



Guidelines for the Equality Fund's *CONNECT* Expression of Interest

From **August 31 to September 16, 2026**, closing at **17:00 EDT (UTC-4)**, submit your Expression of Interest for consideration under our ***CONNECT*** funding stream.

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Section I: General Information on the Equality Fund

Introduction

The Equality Fund is a model for sustainably resourcing women's rights organizations and feminist movements, through global grantmaking, gender-lens investing, policy advocacy, and feminist philanthropy. The Equality Fund raises, invests and moves money to people-powered movements across the Global South. We focus on gender equality because it's an evidence-based strategy for achieving greater peace and prosperity. Launched in 2019, the Equality Fund has disbursed over \$125 million to date which flows to more than 1,800 organizations in over 100 countries.

With significant contributions from and partnerships with the Government of Canada, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, & Development Office, Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, and other donors, we provide resources to feminist organizations, funds, and movements working from the grassroots level to the regional and global stage. Women's rights organizations and feminist movements are leading the change in their communities and the Equality Fund as a global fund is investing in people with local solutions for the world's most complex problems.

Equality Fund currently has four funding programs:

- **Catalyze:** resourcing of individual women's rights and feminist organizations;
- **Activate:** resourcing of Feminist Funds;
- **Prepare, Respond & Care:** resourcing of women's rights and feminist organizations working in challenging crisis contexts including political, humanitarian, conflict and post-conflict settings.
- **Connect:** resourcing of the relationships, infrastructure, and collective capacity that enable feminist and allied liberatory movements to build power together.

The Equality Fund provides **multi-year and flexible funding** to support grantee partners' priorities centering [Feminist Funding Principles](#) we have jointly articulated with other donors. At the Equality Fund, we strive to build partnerships that go beyond financial commitments. This includes accompaniment, learning and exchanges, joint strategies to strengthen our collective advocacy capacity, and resource mobilization to support feminist movements globally.

To learn more about the Equality Fund, please visit our [website](#), read our [2025/26 Annual Report](#), or visit us on [social media](#).

Section II: **CONNECT** Funding Stream

The **Equality Fund** has a multi-streamed grantmaking approach that provides financial support to feminist organizations and women's funds in different ways.

VISION: The Equality Fund envisions a world transformed by the untapped potential of women, girls and gender expansive people.

WHAT PREVENTS OUR VISION FROM BEING REALITY: Today we are living in a world where coordinated anti-rights, anti-democracy, anti-gender, and authoritarian movements are thriving after years (and sometimes decades) of patient investment. The impact of this work is transcending the boundaries of any single issue, population, or movement. Our political, economic, and social systems are deeply interconnected. No single movement can meet the scale of today's challenges alone. Yet, much philanthropic funding remains organized in thematic silos that reinforce fragmentation and leave little room for the collaboration needed to address shared root causes.

OUR STRATEGY: CONNECT, one of the Equality Fund's grantmaking streams, is opening funding to collaborations who are seeking to address this period of intensifying anti-rights forces by building relationships across movements that have not historically worked together that now seek to work equitably towards shared goals. This pilot round of funding focuses on strengthening the relationships, infrastructure, trust, shared strategy, and collective capacity that enable feminist, women's rights, and allied social justice movements to build power together across issues, geographies, and constituencies towards a shared vision for gender equality and social justice. CONNECT disincentivizes funding silos by investing in bridging movements who have identified that they need to be working together in order to address this moment of escalating attacks on rights, democracy, and social justice.

By supporting the coming together of movements that see and work on different parts of interconnected systems, CONNECT helps create opportunities for coordinated collective efforts that can influence multiple sectors and systems simultaneously. Grounded in feminist and intersectional principles, the program also seeks to model the values it promotes through trust-based, participatory, and non-extractive grantmaking practices. Ultimately, **CONNECT invests in the infrastructure of collective action towards a world where all can live in dignity**, recognizing that lasting systems change depends both on strong individual movements as well as the strength of the relationships between them.

This funding stream is a pilot based on research conducted about movement needs and the opportunity that the current challenges present for collective action to combat increasingly coordinated anti-rights efforts. As part of this funding stream, the Equality Fund seeks to learn with

partners about whether this type of funding can strengthen the feminist movement eco-system and adapt future funding cycles as needed.

Section III: Invitation for **CONNECT** Expression of Interest (Eoi)

The application process for the CONNECT grant opportunity will be conducted in two stages: the Expression of Interest, and an Advanced Application. The time period to apply to CONNECT will be August 31 to September 16, 2026. See Section IV for more information on our application process.

Grant Opportunity

A total **CAD \$4 million per year** will be disbursed to selected **five to seven collaborations** for in this round of grantmaking under Connect.

Grant Length

Connect grants will be an initial two years in length with potential for additional years, and with an expected start date of **February 1, 2027**.

Grant Size

The maximum total grant amount available is CAD \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 per year - depending on the specifics of the proposal and the financial management experience of the organization that will be managing the financial aspects of the grant.

Sources of Funding

The Equality Fund receives funding from a variety of sources, including the Government of Canada, the UK Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, foundations, and the public. Bilateral funders have specific terms and conditions on the use of those funds – first and foremost that grants go to [ODA-eligible countries](#) – and we work hard to make the requirements as simple and straightforward as possible.

We continue to surface, advocate and negotiate with our funders on the limitations of this approach for feminist movement building: we recognize that there are organizations critical to supporting vibrant, local movements that are constantly left out of government and philanthropic funding opportunities because of ODA requirements.

Who Can Apply

CONNECT is intended to resource and strengthen the collaborative work that enables feminist and allied liberatory movements to build power together. **We are looking to support collaborations that connect feminist actors and other allies.**

We recognize that effective collaborations may involve many different kinds of actors representing different roles in the context. Political parties, government bodies, for-profit organizations, and individuals are **NOT** eligible for funding but may engage in the collaboration's activities on their own accord.

We also recognize that effective collaborations take many different forms and respond in different ways to the challenges around them. The application explicitly asks open ended questions to listen to what is most important to movement actors and allies as they work together towards shared goals.

Roles & Responsibilities of Lead Organization(s)

To support operational efficiency, for this application process, your collaboration will require either:

1. A single Lead Organization: will assume all of the responsibilities listed in the table below (programmatic + financial)
2. Two Separate Programmatic and Financial Lead Organizations: in the case where a collaboration identifies separate Programmatic and Financial Leads (which may be a fiscal sponsor), the division of responsibilities are listed in the table below.

Equality Fund will prioritize collaborations whose **lead organization is based in the Global South or East.**

Programmatic Lead	Financial Lead
• Submits the application; • Signs the grant agreement, in addition to the Financial Lead; • Submits financial and narrative reporting on behalf of the collaborative.	• Signs the grant agreement, in addition to the Programmatic Lead; • Receive and share the funds, ensure their proper management; • Completes financial reporting and shares with Programmatic Lead.

Eligibility Criteria for the Lead Organization(s)

If there is a single Lead Organization, they must meet all of the eligibility criteria listed below for separate Leads.

Programmatic Lead:

- Primarily governed, led, and directed by local women, youth, girls, and/or non-binary people **from the Global South and East**;
- Women, youth, girls, and/or non-binary people make up a majority of the organization's leadership and board or coordinating committee;
- The promotion of women, youth, girls, and non-binary people's rights is their primary mission—and not only as the focus of part of their programmes;
- Works from a feminist and/or women's rights perspective for structural change on issues affecting women, youth, girls, and/or non-binary people;
- Committed to feminist movement building and collaborating with other women, youth, gender expansive, and/or Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) organizations;
- Registered/operates in ODA-eligible countries¹, with the exception of Afghanistan²;
- Equality Fund grantee partners can participate in a collaboration, however they cannot be a lead organization of a CONNECT application. Participation of a current EF grantee partner will not impact the consideration of the application;
- Be able to complete proposal documents, narrative, and financial reports in English, French, or Spanish, and be able to verbally communicate in one of those languages.

Financial Lead:

- Has a valid, legal registration;
- Has externally audited financial reports for the last two fiscal years **(to be submitted with the Expression of Interest - see section below)**;
- Manages an annual expenditure of at least CAD \$325,000 in one of the last two fiscal years;
- Ensures capacity of the participating organizations in the collaboration to receive, manage, and report on the funds that they will receive through a Connect grant.

¹ If your organization is led by diaspora women/gender expansive peoples and you are headquartered in a non-ODA eligible country, but work exclusively in an ODA eligible country, we may be able to consider your application. Funding for *Connect* is supported by resources from bilateral funders. As such, there is a requirement to ensure the majority of resources are invested in grantmaking exclusively to ODA-eligible countries.

² Due to Canadian sanctions and laws against financing terrorism, at this time Equality Fund is unable to provide grants in Afghanistan. We are continuing our advocacy with the Canadian government to demonstrate how important it is to fund work outside of what may be considered strictly humanitarian aid.

Supporting Documents: Externally Audited Financial Reports

At this stage — to validate that the Financial Eligibility Criteria is being met — you will be asked to submit externally audited institutional financial reports from the **last two fiscal years**.

If the organization acting as the Financial Lead does not strictly meet the institutional audit requirement but it meets the requirement of having managed/expended at least CAD \$325,000 in one of the last two fiscal years AND has other audit-related documents (eg. project audits), you will be asked to submit those documents and to provide a short explanation of why the organization does not have externally audited institutional financial reports.

Section IV: How to Apply

Our Application Process

We have heard from organizations around the world that they spend too much time preparing proposals that may not get funded. In recognition and appreciation of your valuable time, we strive to be transparent about what will and will not be funded and what eligibility requirements must be met. Given the very limited number of awards to be given out, we strongly encourage organizations to not complete an Expression of Interest if you do not meet all of the eligibility requirements. Our application process is divided into two stages to further lessen the burden on applicants who are less likely to be selected for funding.

Pre-application stage: Eligibility Quiz	Visit the EF Community Portal to complete an Eligibility Quiz in order to determine your eligibility to submit an Expression of Interest. Eligibility Quiz link: https://equalityfund.my.site.com/fundseekerportal/s/eligibility-quiz Once you complete the Eligibility Quiz, if your collaboration is eligible you will be taken to the log-in page of our Community Portal. We recommend that you bookmark the Community Portal page for future access. If you do not have an existing account, select “Sign-up”. Once your account is created, you will be sent an email with a link to the Community Portal.
Stage 1: Submitting an Expression of	If your collaboration is eligible, between August 31 and September 16, 2026, (closing at 17:00 EDT (UTC-4)), register your collaboration’s interest in receiving funding by submitting an Expression of Interest via the

Interest (EOI)	Equality Fund's Community Portal³ that provides key information about your vision, mission, and work to advance women's rights and gender equality through cross-movement collaboration. We recognize and appreciate the time that you will take to share this information, and value the opportunity to get to know more about the collaborative work. • See Annex 1 for a link to a copy of the Expression of Interest template, to allow your team to collaborate offline on the application before submitting responses through our Community Portal. • Please direct general inquiries to grants@equalityfund.ca. Note that due to the high volume of inquiries we expect to receive we will be unable to provide guidance on case-specific situations.
Stage 2: Submitting an Advanced Application by invitation	• Up to eighteen collaborations that meet the selection criteria and priorities of the grantmaking cycle will be invited to submit an Advanced Application. You will be asked to provide further details about context, collaboration's priorities, strategies and proposed actions, as well as a budget and supporting documents (such as <i>registration</i>, <i>Financial Management manual</i>, <i>Memorandum of Understanding</i>, etc). • This stage also includes a reference and endorsement check with organizations/allies and funders that have worked with you before. • Organizations shortlisted for Advanced Applications will receive an invitation by November 1, 2026 and will have 4 weeks to complete the proposal. Please note that only those organizations selected will receive an invitation from EF to submit an Advanced Application. <i>Due to the volume of applications we expect to receive, we will not be able to respond to any kind of requests for updates on the status of your Expression of Interest application.</i> • Ultimately, we expect to award between 5-7 grants. Grants are expected to have a start date of February 1, 2027.

³ In exceptional circumstances, we are able to accept Expressions of Interest by email - reach out to us at grants@equalityfund.ca for more information.

Statement on Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

We recognize that AI can be a helpful tool for applicants. When completing your Expression of Interest, if you choose to use AI, we request you write your first draft and use AI to *refine* your ideas and *polish* the way you communicate about your work. We want to see your actual experience and how you think—not AI-generated responses. Applications will not be assessed on the quality of writing, but on the quality of your ideas and collaboration, and the understanding of your context.

If English, Spanish or French are not your native language(s), you may use AI for translation purposes.

Our Participatory Selection Process

The selection of successful Expression of Interest and Advanced Applications, will be led by a participatory advisory model, engaging activists, regional women’s funds, professionals, and community representatives with diverse perspectives and expertise in movement infrastructure. This approach aims to ensure that funding decisions are grounded in the realities, priorities, and wisdom of movements and communities.

Sanctions Screenings

As part of due diligence, the Equality Fund uses a software called Sanctions.io to screen applicants invited to the Advanced Application stage; to safeguard exposure to terrorism, human rights abuses, money laundering, fraud, and other types of criminal activity, in addition to regular screenings of all active grantee partners. We screen the name of the organization, and key organizational contacts, the signatories of the grant agreement, the fiscal sponsor contact if applicable, and senior management contacts if needed.

In the event that a sanctions screening raises a credible flag regarding one of your organization’s contacts (which is a rare occurrence), we will request a copy of the individual’s identification document to confirm the validity of the match.

Glossary

- **Social Movements** - An organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action ([AWID](#))
- **Feminist Movements** - Social movements have certain feminist characteristics, including:
 1. Their agenda is built from a gendered analysis of the problem;
 2. Women are the subjects, not objects;
 3. They espouse feminist values and ideology;
 4. They have systematically built and centered women’s leadership;
 5. Their political goals are gendered;
 6. They use gendered strategies and methods;
 7. They create more feminist organizations ([AWID](#))

- **Allied movements** - Groups, coalitions, or institutional partners who find commonalities in shared purpose with and acting together with feminist movements to create change to achieve more than they could alone ([JASS](#))
- **Cross-movement** - Work that builds alliances with other movements beyond traditional feminist circles in order to create a united front against common threats ([JASS](#)).
- **Movement infrastructure** - The resources, skills, and people that serve the whole *movement ecosystem*, which includes organizations, networks, and leaders. ([NPQ Quarterly](#))

Annex 1: Expression of Interest templates

- [English Expression of Interest](#)
- [Spanish Expression of Interest](#)
- [French Expression of Interest](#)

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