

Group CEO Brief for applicants



We live in times of great uncertainty and division. Rising inequality, exclusion and hardship are driving unnecessary suffering and political instability. In this context JRF's ambitious mission - to support and speed up the transition to a more equitable and just future, free from poverty, where people and planet can flourish - has never felt more necessary or daunting.

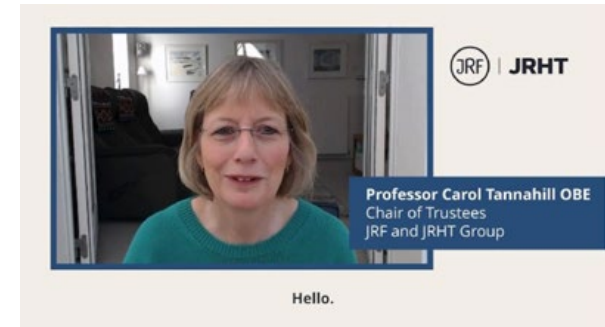
Our goal is to see social and economic systems changing to give people greater control over the most important parts of their lives, with a more equal distribution of material and social resources for everyone to enjoy dignity, opportunity and hope and enable their fullest contribution to society.

We are here for the long-term, and are focussed on the structures and systems that perpetuate poverty and inequality across the UK.

Confronting these effectively requires a level of urgency as well as a willingness to tackle the root causes of disadvantage and exclusion.



Welcome and thank you for your interest in becoming our next group CEO. In this role you will be succeeding Paul Kissack who has recently taken up a Permanent Secretary role in Government following five highly successful years running our organisation. This is a brilliant role at a complex time in the UK: a time of unprecedented opportunity and scope to disrupt entrenched systems and thinking to bring about real and lasting change for the better.



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A better future really is possible

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) is an independent social change organisation based in York. Working across the UK, we have offices in London, Glasgow and Belfast. We're the parent organisation of the JRF-JRHT group, which includes the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT).

Our work is focussed on real world change – working with a wide range of partners and alliances for change, proposing policy interventions that address the causes and consequences of poverty and resourcing numerous forms of social innovation. We seek to influence those with the power to act now, including Governments, and we help support new propositions that challenge what's possible and allow us to imagine different futures in which people live free from poverty and marginalisation.

Our Trustees have recognised the deep and growing crisis of poverty in all its facets and have consequently agreed a bold strategic direction, building on our founder's original purpose to address not only the symptoms of poverty, but also the structures and social wiring that perpetuate it.



Horizons. Power. Equity. Risk. Infrastructure. Plurality.

As we mark the centenary of Joseph Rowntree's passing this year, we find ourselves at a critical juncture. A visionary social pioneer, Rowntree laid the foundations for our work during a period of profound economic and social change. Today, we face challenges that, while different in specifics, echo the uncertainties and disruptions of his time.

Last year, we committed to an innovative strategy spanning three routes for change:

- 1. Shifting the terms of the debate:** Our insight, policy and advocacy programmes focus on destabilising dominant systems by shining a light on the ways that they – and the assumptions that underpin them – are increasingly failing people and planet. We propose credible policy ideas that address both immediate needs and deeper system changes, challenging views on what's possible, bridging to new norms and catalysing effective coalitions to make them a reality. The common theme across this work is household economic security; its constituent parts (including the worst forms of poverty and hardship), its dynamics and drivers, and its relationships with the wider political economy.
- 2. Supporting and shielding the new:** We believe that there are nascent, practical examples of real-world alternatives driving real change now. Whether that be new models for delivering public goods or different operating systems (such as forms of contracts, investment vehicles and governance frameworks) that challenge the economic status quo in favour of a more democratic and equitable approach to the ownership and management of assets, wealth and ideas.

We are therefore making sizeable commitments to resourcing an emerging ecology of organisations working in this vein, through a combination of unrestricted enabling funding, help accessing other important sources of financial, intellectual and relational support, the provision of tools to capture and share insights, and other field building initiatives.

Simultaneously we are committed to creating more benign environmental conditions for this work, by building new institutional capacities and capabilities, creating new resource flows and fostering the mindset shifts needed to mainstream the ideas we want to support and grow.

- 3. Building infrastructure for the transition:** As a relatively wealthy, independently endowed foundation, we have a responsibility to enable many others who broadly share our aims to advance their efforts. Our Insight Infrastructure programme is designed to simplify and democratise access to high-quality data to shine a light on poverty and insecurity and transform knowledge into meaningful action to combat injustice and inequality.

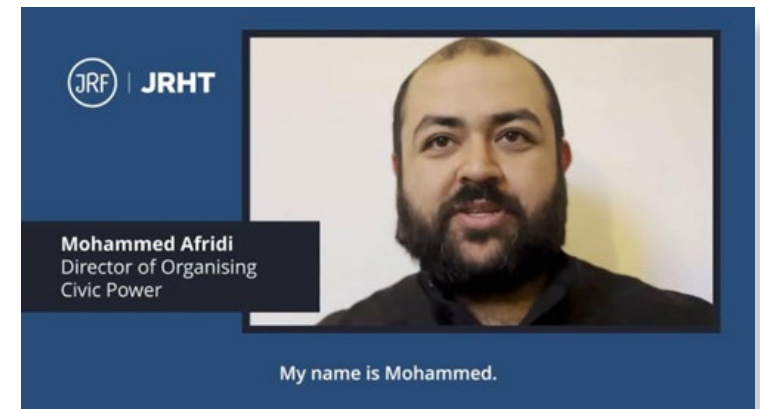
Cutting across these strands are our six guiding principles (Horizons, Power, Equity, Risk, Infrastructure and Plurality) and our work to **think differently about how we utilise and invest our endowment**. We are a wealthy organisation, with an endowment worth over £400m – jointly held for the benefit of both JRF and JRHT – and which we have historically invested in a traditional way with the focus on growing its financial value rather than directly on furthering the mission.

In 2024, we agreed to adopt a new strategy and move to a fully mission-aligned endowment over time. To make that a reality, in the years ahead, we will be moving the wealth we steward into a new mix of social, impact and transformational investments, better aligned with our mission: investments that will strike a new balance between financial return and contribution to mission, giving greater prioritisation to the latter. We will do this alongside investing significantly more on mission-aligned activity and system-changing work, over and above historic levels.

Our partners

We work with others in a variety of different ways to tackle the conditions that cause and create poverty, inequality and marginalisation across society.

Through our strategic programme of work, we have taken substantial grant-making decisions, moving resources out into fields of practice where others are building alternatives that speak to our mission, that are about supporting and speeding up the transition towards more equitable and just futures.



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Organising to deliver our mission

JRF has a group structure, comprising the JRF social change organisation and the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT). Our work is supported by around 150 permanent staff across York, London, Belfast and Glasgow.

JRF and JRHT have a common history, charitable objectives and endowment, and a number of shared services are provided across the group. JRHT provides housing and care services, predominantly in York, but also in Leeds, Scarborough, and Hartlepool, as well as in an increasing number of other smaller communities in North and East Yorkshire. It currently owns and manages over 2,500 homes with many of these held in mixed tenure schemes.

JRHT has recently agreed a new mission to be a housing association that is sustainable and engaging, that provides high quality and continuously improving services and decent affordable homes in well managed communities prioritising those in greatest need.

Although JRHT has its own board and Managing Director, the Group CEO and JRF Trustees have parental responsibility for the work of the housing trust, including the stewardship of the endowment that is shared between the two organisations.



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Our Board

To read more about the members of our Board, [please follow this link](#)



The group CEO role

Our group CEO reports directly to our Chair and Board of Trustees and is responsible for the strategic leadership and organisational wellbeing of the JRF organisation, including group-wide shared services. For JRHT, delegated authority for daily operations is in place with the Managing Director JRHT. The group CEO role manages seven direct reports: the Managing Director JRHT; Group Director of Finance; JRF Director of People; JRF Director of Policy and Insight; JRF Director of Communication and Public Engagement; JRF Director of Emerging Futures, and Associate Director Chief Executive's Office.

What the role is accountable for

- strategic direction and stewardship: development and guardianship of strategic plan, most senior contact with stakeholders and others, determination of strategy for engagement with governments and other stakeholders across the UK, oversight of investment strategy and financial management;
- corporate governance: the most senior member of the executive with responsibility for ensuring that trustees are enabled to carry out their role, that all legal and regulatory responsibilities are discharged, and that the governance of the organisations meets the highest possible standards;
- representation and advocacy: responsible for representing both JRF and JRHT at the most senior levels, and in the media;
- the activities of both JRF and JRHT: ultimate responsibility for direct service provision, policy development, insight, campaigning, grant funding and communications and the services which enable these (this includes sizeable social housing and property stock and a number of care services establishments);
- delivery and performance: ensuring consistent high-quality delivery of expected outcomes and impact;
- resource allocation and management: ultimate responsibility for the staff, finance and other resources of both JRF and JRHT;
- organisational values, principles and culture: responsible, with Trustees and the executive team, for ensuring that JRF's values and principles are applied throughout the organisation and its work.

Who we are looking for.

Part One – your knowledge and experience.

- Our next CEO will offer a strong personal track record of leadership and senior management, including prior experience of leading organisations and / or of leading significant divisions within larger organisations.
- You will have a thorough understanding of the social and political landscape across the UK and of the regulatory environment for housing and care, and charities, across the UK.
- You will understand how to develop impact and learning through strategy delivery, including from those who have lived experience.
- Your positive track record of working with boards means you have a thorough understanding of governance considerations.
- You're already an accomplished public speaker with experience of working well with the media and opinion-forming community.
- You're experienced in budget control and overview and understand what it means to run a modern Foundation with appropriate investment strategies in place.

Part Two – your skills and abilities.

- Your communication skills are highly effective and you have an engaging, persuasive presentation style that reflects our values.
- Sophisticated interpersonal skills are essential: you will deploy a range of different styles and approaches to get the best from Trustee and Executive personalities and experiences.
- You are able to hold a space in which complex ideas might be explored and developed, and in which emotions and perspectives are balanced in the interests of progress and momentum.
- Your influencing skills are well developed.
- You will also offer JRF highly developed skills in advocacy: as leading advocate for our policy and practice positions you know how to use a wide register of advocacy and relationship-building skills to make the case internally and externally.
- High intellectual and analytical capacity is important, including an understanding of the value of different types of data and intelligence, and the ability to use evidence and insights gathered by JRF / JRHT to influence public policy and practice.

Part Three – the skills and personal behaviours we need.

- You are a natural partnership-worker with warmth and curiosity.
- You have a personal presence that immediately secures trust and respect.
- Your high emotional intelligence means you can straddle different stakeholder needs with sensitivity and care.
- You will be confident when convening stakeholders around difficult issues and systemic challenges.
- You are clearly committed to the mission of JRF, to anti-racism and to providing leadership on equality, diversity and inclusion.
- You bring maturity of judgement, are calm and a respectful listener.

We are committed to the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism and see these as critical in helping us to achieve our mission. As part of this we believe that a wide diversity of views, skills, and experience will help generate better ideas, and lead to better decision making and, as such, we particularly welcome applicants from minoritised backgrounds.

We also believe that it is important that our leaders have a connection to the reality of poverty, marginality or powerlessness. This might include direct lived experience of poverty, inequality or marginality, or through living in a community characterised by poverty or social and economic exclusion. It could also include working in or experience of the systems that perpetuate unequal power dynamics, poverty and inequality, or through being involved in work to directly change these systems.

Salary and benefits

Remuneration

We are offering a salary of £166,500 to accept the role on a full-time, permanent basis.

Location and relocation

The role is contractually York-based, operating from the JRF main offices. The postholder will be based in the North, have a good understanding of the challenges of challenged regions in the North/Northeast and will have a strong, regular (weekly) presence in the York office. The role will require regular travel to other sites across the UK to participate in stakeholder meetings. JRF is willing to consider reimbursement of some relocation costs for the successful candidate, where appropriate.

Pension

6% employer contribution with minimum 3% by employee. Payment via salary sacrifice (optional) reduces National Insurance Contribution payments.

Annual Leave

In addition to the 28 statutory paid holiday days per year (FTE), JRF employees receive an additional 5 days' paid leave for a total of 33 days. Employees can choose to purchase up to an additional weeks' leave per year, or to sell 1 or ½ week of holiday.

Additional benefits

- Enhanced sick pay of up to 36 weeks full pay (dependent on length of service)
- 26 weeks' Maternity leave, and 6 weeks' Paternity leave at full pay
- Life Assurance of 3x salary for all pension scheme members.
- Employee Assistance Programme for finance related support
- Wellbeing Centre, providing the education support and tools necessary to live a healthy and happy life.
- Health Cash Plan
- Gym Membership discounts
- Eye care vouchers
- Cycle to Work scheme
- Charitable donation matching via Give As You Earn
- Shopping discounts

To apply for the role

To make an application, visit <https://starfishsearch.com/jobs/jrf-group-ceo/> and click on the apply now button, with the following prepared:

- Your CV (no more than three sides please).
- A covering letter (no more than two sides please) that sets out:
 - your motivation for applying for the role
 - the specific experience you can bring against Part One of the person specification
 - your perspective on the main considerations for JRF in delivering the strategy.

We would also be grateful if you would complete the Equality and Diversity monitoring form on the online application process. This form is for monitoring purposes only and is not treated as part of your application.

Closing date for receipt of applications is **Monday 5th January 2026**.

Timetable for our selection process

Closing date:	Monday 5th January 2026
Preliminary interviews:	w/c 12th and 19th January 2026
Final Panel interviews:	Early to mid-February, to be confirmed (the Panel may wish to offer a second meeting).