

PLOT YOUR OWN COURSE

An Evaluation of the
Power of Pop Fund Pilot
By Eva Didier



POWER OF
POP FUND



UNBOUND



THE
LINBURY
TRUST



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

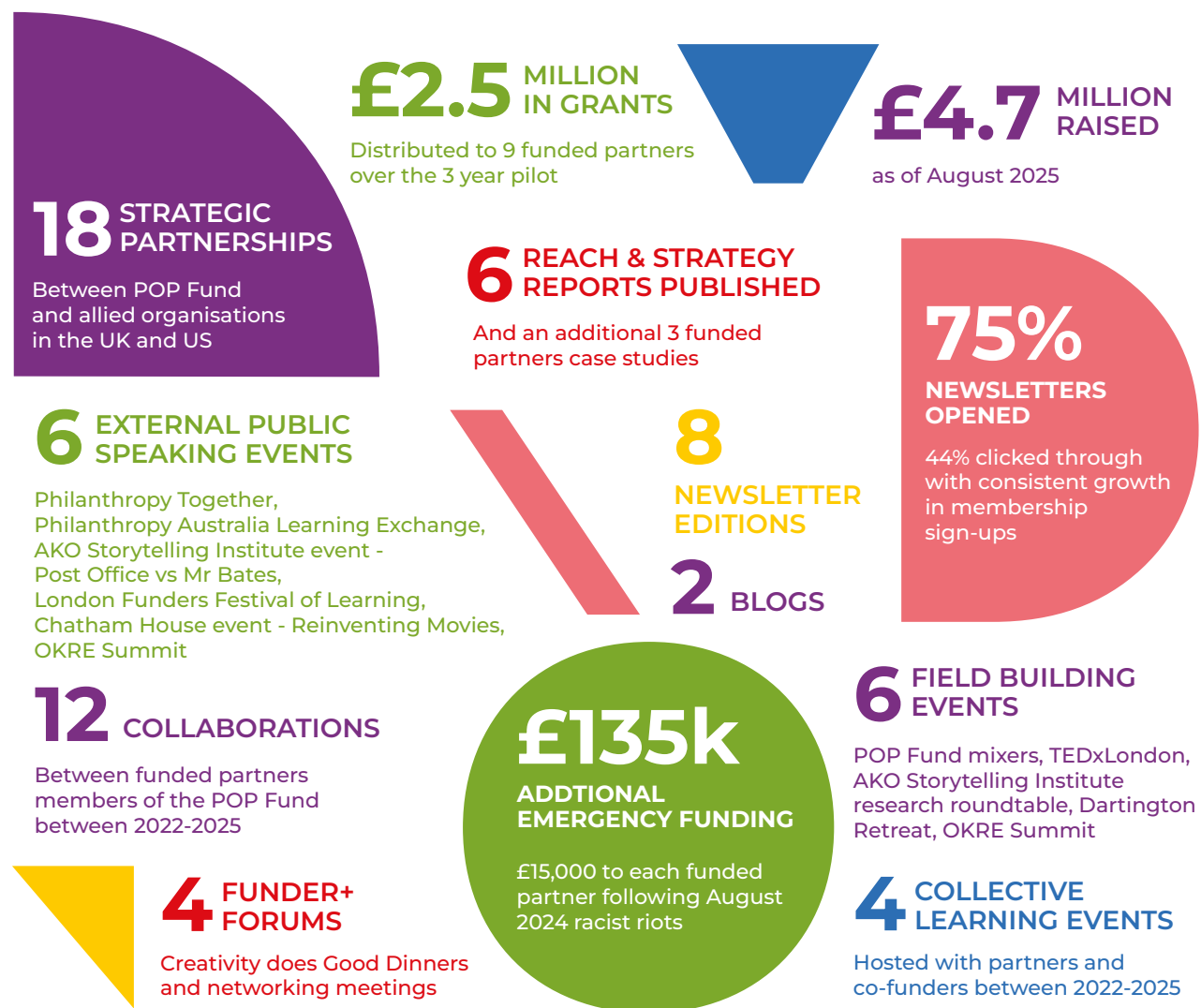
Three Years of POP Fund at a Glance

The Power of Pop (POP) Fund is a pooled fund supporting organisations using pop culture and creativity to advance justice in the UK. The POP Fund has a particular focus on migration and racial justice, while acknowledging the deep interwoven causes of climate justice, gender justice, economic justice and democracy.

Collectively, our funded partners use storytelling and cultural methods to amplify the experiences of racialised communities with a view to making society more equitable. We champion community leaders, support organisations and foster the development of the cultural strategy field.

We support organisations who think outside the box, developing innovative interventions to achieve profound impact.

At its core, the work of the work of the POP Fund is rooted in an analysis of power relations: who gets to create cultural content, in what contexts, and who gets represented. The evaluation found evidence that over its three-year pilot from April 2022 to May 2025, the POP Fund and funded partner organisations made a significant contribution to the pop culture for social justice ecosystem in the UK.



1.1. Impact Summary

The POP Fund is shifting power across four core outcome areas



Panellists and audience members at POP Fund Igniting Impact event July 2025

Outcome area 1 Cultivating Community Leadership

We found significant evidence that the POP Fund cultivates community leadership by shifting power in a number of material ways - ultimately **reshaping what constitutes leadership**. The POP Fund has:

- Led to **progressive governance practice** by centring power and moving from inclusion to decision-making - this is evident in particular through the Community Council constitution and its communal practice of leadership.
- Prompted a **cultural shift** by applying a systemic lens on obstacles facing racialised creatives. Both the POP Fund - through its approach to grant-making - and its funded partners apply a strength-based vision designed to enable self-realisation for culture makers.
- Set new standards when it comes to **organisational leadership**. Both the POP Fund and some funded partners model care-centred work cultures, and embed intergenerational thinking into their operations in order to build lasting legacies.

Outcome area 2 Strengthening Organisations

This is the outcome where there is the strongest body of evidence of the positive impact of the POP Fund on its funded partners. The POP Fund has built **scaffolding for success** for its partners in a number of ways:

- Over the course of the pilot, the POP Fund's **core funding** and its **Funder+ support** have been instrumental in developing and strengthening partners' organisational capacity (operations, systems and governance) and expertise.
- By building and reinforcing organisational systems, the POP Fund has enabled funded partners to develop and share their skills, confidence, and approaches so that their unique contributions to social justice have been amplified.
- By facilitating a mindset shift from survival to transformational mode amongst funded partners: the POP Fund's also enables partners to invest in their own structures, build organisational resilience and trial new approaches.
- By building and disseminating accessible tools and resources across the cultural strategy ecosystem, the POP Fund's also contributes to building up the cultural strategy field in the UK.

Outcome area 3

Building Infrastructure



The POP Fund has prioritised a relational approach designed to **share in power**. The evidence shows that at the end of the pilot's three years, new and existing relationships are being forged and reinforced, with some room for progress to reach the maximum potential of the approach developed in the Funder+ model:

- Investing time and resources into supporting and fostering networks and connections at the speed of trust - both for funded partners and wider community of industry and funder allies - is significant in a context where community organising is systematically underprioritised and underfunded.
- By supporting the economy of collaborations, providing physical spaces and event opportunities for organisations to meet up and skill share, the POP Fund is also encouraging autonomy, sustainability and trustworthiness amongst partners, without mediating relationships.
- To fully seize upon the opportunities developed by the POP Fund approach, it is crucial that all funded partners are convinced of the utility and are able to take advantage of the collective learning events and other support offered through the Funder+ model.

Outcome area 4

Engaging Philanthropy



In setting up the POP Fund as a pooled fund, one aim was to expand **potential and impact** for co-funders, by facilitating learning on how to shift the public understanding on migration and racial justice narratives, and in doing so, encourage new funders to join in. This vision is beginning to materialise although there is more work to be done to engage new funders around the power and potential of cultural strategy to create change. Some valuable learnings have emerged to encourage greater philanthropic engagement:

- Rallying funders around a clear, explicit and unified purpose is key to promoting cultural strategy as an approach.
- Contributing thought-leadership to the UK field can be additive by targeting research interest at two key levels:
 1. Building powerful **case studies** unpicking the mechanics of how content shifts audience perceptions;
 2. Investing in research pitched at **long-term outcomes** i.e. what mobilises audiences to advocate and act; how to advocate for inclusivity and marginalised talent; how authentic creations that drive social and environmental change can reach the masses.

1.2. Lessons Learned

The orchestra needs to play not just the brass

Looking ahead, there are key opportunities for **growth and strategic alignment** across the **POP Fund community** (the core team and funders, funded partners and collaborators) as the POP Fund embarks on its post-pilot era - involving **all stakeholders**:



Power of Pop Collective Learning Event - July 2025

POP Fund organisation	POP Fund community	POP Fund in the UK cultural strategy ecosystem
Governance Structure Reflecting on the POP Fund post-pilot governance structure, balancing the advantages between the Comic Relief host (reputation, endorsement and financial and operational bolstering) with the opportunities presented by the POP Fund being independent (own voice and more freedom to experiment).	Reviewing the Grassroots Strategy With the multi-year core grant having provided the opportunity for scaling up for funded partner organisations, there is a question mark on whether to consolidate this approach with future cohorts by continuing to award grants to grassroots organisations or to prioritise bigger, medium-sized organisations.	Clarifying the Contribution of the POP Fund There is an opportunity to build the POP Fund brand and develop its cultural strategy expertise so it is seen as a credible and legitimate expert in the pop culture for social justice field.
Clarifying the POP Fund's North Star Communicating more clearly and loudly a unified purpose and vision is key to galvanise partners and stakeholders.	Scalability Anticipating challenges as the POP Fund continues growing and onboarding more partners, as it will put pressure on operational capacity for the core team and the Community Council.	Sharing the Impact Learning Responsibility Comprehensive audience research studies tracking viewing preferences, beliefs and behaviours are costly. This calls for more cross-sector and industry partnerships to fund exciting research opportunities, a better coordinated and pooling effort (financing, skills, deliverables) to deliver additive research that will spark excitement and advocacy for the cultural strategy for social justice ecosystem in the UK.
Refine the POP Fund's Focus The current oscillation between a dual thematic (migration and racial justice) and an innovative approach (cultural strategy) was helpful during the pilot as it allowed for more flexibility in approaching funders. However, this open-endedness might now hinder efforts when approaching potential funders.	Strategic Framework Alignment Recognising that not all funded partners see themselves in the POP Fund strategic framework, especially in terms of the ambition to move from subculture to pop culture, reflect on how each type of funded partner might play a different role for the ecosystem and assess the downsides.	

1.3. Recommendations

Plot your own course



Power of Pop Mixer - April 2024

At the end of its pilot, the POP Fund is on track to deliver on its four core outcomes, and is in a good place - with enough time and practice - to reflect on its internal structure and refine some of its focus in terms of vision, approach and scaling ambition. There is now an opportunity for the POP Fund to **'plot its own course'** collaborating and learning with peer organisations whilst

confidently and distinctively embracing its own voice in order to fully embrace its potential and contribute to shaping **equitable futures** in the UK. This will require navigating competing priorities and intentional alignment amongst key stakeholders and developing the POP Fund's public presence:

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Be Loud and Proud
About Your Vision

02

Lead with an
Intersectional Lens

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Align on
Scaling Ambition

04

Prioritise Additive Research
Relevant Across Sectors

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Put Pop Culture
in the Centre



Be Loud and Proud About Your Vision

The current vision developed in 2024 around **equitable futures** needs to guide the POP Fund's purpose, and be more deeply embedded within strategy and communications of the POP Fund, or be revised to be fit for purpose.

In particular, it needs to hail Fund's communications and be distilled across the Theory of Change.



Lead with an Intersectional Lens

Migration and racial justice are essential lenses for the POP Fund that address systemic issues: i.e. the lack of representation of racialised creatives within entertainment and cultural industries, and the lack of or misrepresentation of stories about people of colour and migrants. Yet, these two core areas represent only a small drop of funding available in the UK and the adverse political context is inviting cautiousness in funders and their trustees. There is a risk that by being thematic-focused first, the POP Fund is limiting its reach and ability to fundraise more widely across the philanthropic network in the UK. It is worth considering leading with the vision of equitable futures, underpinned by an intersectional lens and covering more cause areas (highlighting racism and migration justice as core areas wherever relevant).



Align on Scaling Ambition

Decide whether, based on the POP Fund's internal capacities and impact ambition, it is possible and desirable to onboard new partners that are grassroots organisations or if there is a need to shift towards medium-sized organisations. Additionally, if the course set out in the strategic framework holds for internal stakeholders (from subculture to pop culture and mainstream culture), it is important to align on selection criteria (ie. appetite and capacity for funded partners in reaching audiences outside of lived experience). It is key to navigate friction between the POP Fund's ethics (respecting funded partners' autonomy), and expectations linked to the Funder+ model with intentionality during the selection process, to not create a two-tiered involvement model for partners long-term.



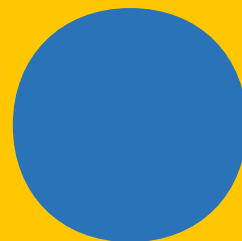
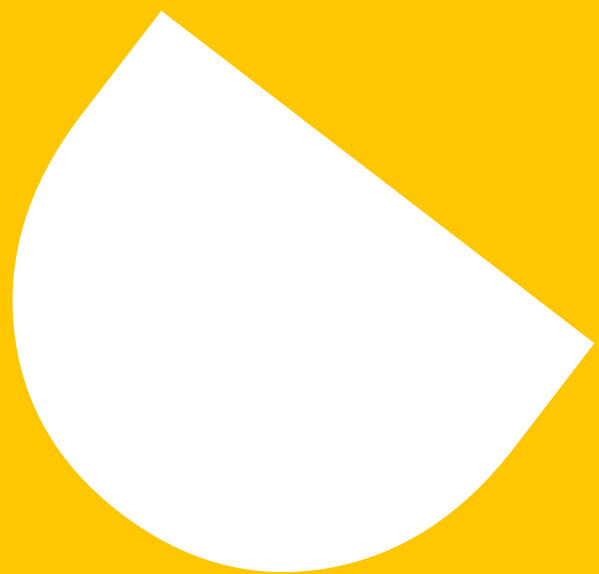
Prioritise Additive Research Relevant Across Sectors

There is a lot of available research across geographies and sectors. There is a need to focus and target research to align with the bigger (and more complex) questions most relevant for our stakeholders and in line with our theory of change: what mobilises audiences to engage, advocate and act for social and environmental justice ; what content drives social and environmental change at a large scale; and what successfully shifts the entertainment industry towards more inclusivity for marginalised talent. There is an opportunity to mobilise this interest and pool research costs and capacities across sectors and industries.



Put Pop Culture in the Centre

Pop culture for social justice is a formidable force and this is an exciting time in the UK. Numerous creative outputs have captured the hearts and minds of audiences, creating cultural moments and conversations that have caused ripples across our social, legal and political systems. This has shown how cultural power can be wielded for good. In this context, it's key for the POP Fund to be bold and keep reimagining how cultural strategy must thrive at the intersections of philanthropy and corporate, to bridge these two worlds and harness the strengths of each in order to amplify the POP Fund's impact.



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