



Annual Insights Report 2022-2024: Seeding the foundations of impact

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"We are seeding ideas, strengthening and refining them so they can be developed at scale."

- Power of Pop Fund Portfolio Manager



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FOREWORD



“In the second year of the Power of Pop Fund, we are committing to our value of bold decision-making. Both the programme itself and our funded partners are seeding ideas, strengthening and refining them so they can be developed at scale. In the spirit of worldbuilding, seeding foundations for new futures is critically important.”

- Maxine Thomas-Asante, Power of Pop Fund Portfolio Manager



Power of Pop Community at the June 2024 collective learning event
Photographer: Derick Armah

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the key learnings and emerging impact from the first two years of the [Power of Pop Fund](#) pilot (2022-2024). The report analyses programmatic activities and the impact of these activities.

There have been a considerable number of programmatic activities over the past two years including:

- Grant making
- Grant management
- Hosting collective learning events
- Publishing a briefing paper
- Curating funder relationships
- Onboarding the Community Council
- Devising a strategy
- Hosting the first Power of Pop Fund Mixer
- Providing funder plus support
- Developing a Foundational Framework
- Public speaking and engagement
- Disseminating a Power of Pop Fund Newsletter

The evaluation has found that **the Fund has achieved the following key outcomes:**

1

Increased organisational capacity and expertise.

All six funded partners have achieved this through hiring and retaining staff and establishing new policies, practices and structures. At a programme level, this was achieved through the development of the strategy, devising a framework and the funder plus support.

2

Increased engagement and participation of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects/spaces across the Fund.

This outcome has been achieved through funding organisations 'led by and for' systemically marginalised communities, widening access to development opportunities and delivering direct support to creatives of colour and creatives from marginalised communities.

3

Increasing collaborations and partnerships across the sector.

All of the funded partners reported that they have been able to increase collaborations and partnerships within the wider ecosystem in which they work. The funded partners have achieved this through facilitating peer-learning and delivering collaborative projects. In the last year, the Fund has also played a greater role in fostering relationships across the pop culture for social change ecosystem.

4

Advanced sharing of skills, expertise and learning within and across sectors.

Funded partners are facilitating and delivering a range of activities aimed at bridging new connections between industries, sectors and actors and strengthening the ecosystems in which they work. The Fund has achieved this outcome through sharing learning around the Fund, holding collective learning events and growing interest in funding pop culture for social change work.

There are **key enablers** that have contributed to the success of these outcomes, namely:

This report also provides an overview of the **key challenges** faced by the funded partners, namely:

ENABLERS:

- Access to core funding
- The Portfolio Manager
- Collective learning events

CHALLENGES:

- The lack of long-term sustainable funding
- Staffing and engagement
- The capacity to collaborate with networks, partners and communities
- Evaluating the impact of the Fund
- Communicating and creating impact across the ecosystem

Finally, this report provides **recommendations** for year three of the Fund and beyond, based on the key learning that has emerged from the first two years of the pilot.

Recommendations for the programme

- 1. *Ensure staffing is in place to manage the Fund beyond February 2025*** - Maintaining the role of the Portfolio Manager will be key to ensuring the Fund's impact is maximised and communicated effectively both during the pilot and beyond. In addition, securing the longevity of this role will ensure relationships are maintained with co-funders who are reinvesting.
- 2. *Establish clarity around the future direction of the Fund*** - The Fund is keen to explore how it can respond to multiple, intersectional forms of inequality and disadvantage, such as climate justice and gender justice. The funded partners need to be further involved in this conversation to strike a balance between maintaining the Fund's commitment to racial and migration justice and sustaining investment in this field.
- 3. *Identify and address gaps in infrastructure to support the wider ecosystem*** - The Fund will need to increase its efforts to interrogate the needs of the communities it aims to support and identify gaps in pop culture for social change infrastructure in the UK. This could be addressed through commissioning research or by the Fund playing a larger role in curating events aimed at building infrastructure.
- 4. *Continue to practise patience in this work*** - Both existing co-funders and prospective funders need to be mindful of how much expectation and responsibility is placed on the funded partners and on the Fund itself to evidence cultural change within the timeframe of the Fund. The Fund should ensure it communicates clearly the direct impact it can have, and what is beyond the Fund's remit.

Recommendations for the funded partners

1. Test and utilise the Foundational Framework to situate wider impact and influence - The development of the Foundational Framework presents an opportunity for impact to be understood and legitimised through a social justice lens. For the Framework to continue to evolve, the funded partners need to lead on testing the framework in practice and sharing back learning with the Fund.

2. Articulate impact through a systems change lens - The development of the strategy and revised learning questions for the Fund provides an opportunity for the funded partners to communicate impact through a systems change lens, looking in particular at how they are defining and communicating their purpose, sharing and shifting power, equitably redistributing resources and building new and collaborative relationships.

3. Bring to life the revised learning questions - Funded partners can contribute to measuring progress towards the Fund's goals by beginning to collect and share qualitative and quantitative evidence in line with the revised learning questions within their reporting and evaluation and learning opportunities. This will be supported by the Learning Coordinator whose role will be to curate a MEL framework that effectively captures the specific contribution of the programme within the sector and the funded partners' contributions to wider movements.



Photographer: Derick Armah

INTRODUCTION TO THE POWER OF POP FUND

In 2020, the global Black Lives Matter protests caught international attention. The protests gripped hearts and minds of people from a range of backgrounds, mobilised groups who have historically been apathetic, and demonstrated the power of the grassroots. As a result, the public, private and third sectors responded by channelling resources to address systemic inequality.

Four years on and there has been significant divestment from racial justice programmes, including [funding cuts to DEI initiatives across the public sector](#). The divestment in racial justice has been coupled with continuing disinvestment in arts and the creative sector. As an example, [Arts Council England has experienced 30% budget reduction between 2010 to 2023](#) and the [Department of Education has cut funding for performing and creative arts courses](#) at English universities.

In addition, it is becoming increasingly clear that the most pressing issues of our time - racial justice, migration justice, climate justice and economic justice among others - are inextricably linked. As such, to achieve meaningful change, it is necessary to move away from a conventional single-issue focus and address the root inequities in a society that perpetuates systemic inequality.

In 2016, [Unbound Philanthropy](#) funded an exploratory piece of research, considering the potential of developing the pop culture for social change field in the UK¹. The research was inspired by work in the US to establish the [Pop Culture Collaborative](#), of which Unbound is a founding Managing Partner. Subsequent research in 2021, conducted by Alice Sachrajda and Marzena Zukowska, found that there was indeed potential and appetite for such a fund to exist in the UK, with a focus on racial and migrant justice.² Inspired by the findings, Alice Sachrajda and Unbound Philanthropy set out to manifest this vision into a reality. Bringing on board four additional co-funders, the Power of Pop Fund was born.

The [Power of Pop Fund](#) is a pooled UK funding programme, with the pilot phase running from April 2022 to July 2025. It is funded by [Comic Relief](#), [Unbound Philanthropy](#), [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#), [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#) and [Oak Foundation](#). The initial grant total for the phase being reported on was £1.16 million. With two co-funders having reinvested to date, the total investment value - including grant and management costs - as of August 2024 is £2.41 million. With some co-funders already renewing their grants, the Power of Pop Fund has funding beyond the pilot phase (which concludes in July 2025).

¹ [Alice Sachrajda and Esme Peach \(2017\). Riding the Waves: How pop culture has the potential to catalyse social change in the UK.](#)

² [Alice Sachrajda And Marzena Zukowska \(2021\). New Brave World: The Power, Opportunities and Potential of Pop Culture for Social Change in the UK.](#)



The Power of Pop Fund naturally has significant synergies with the strategies of each of the co-funders. In particular, the co-funders are brought together by a shared interest in pop culture, cultural shift, racial justice, migrant justice, gender justice, climate and equity. The co-funders are interested in learning, collaboration and thought leadership across multiple sectors and partners. The Power of Pop Fund is hosted by Comic Relief, who makes and manages all the grants.

The Power of Pop Fund’s vision is “We envision a society where thought provoking creativity inspires the public to believe in and demand equitable futures. The Fund encourages ambitious and radical approaches to racial and migrant justice grounded in the values of love, care and shared humanity.”

The Power of Pop Fund’s mission is “to advance social justice by championing transformative, community-led organisations that influence pop culture creatively. The Fund aims to provide funding and organisational support to improve the reach, sustainability and impact of these organisations.”



Programme goals

The Power of Pop Fund aims to achieve the following three goals:



Photographer: Derick Armah

1. Cultivate Community Leadership

The Fund invests in organisations led by people from systemically marginalised communities, with an understanding that there is power in who gets to create and influence culture. By supporting community leadership, the Fund hopes to leave positive imprints and lasting legacies.

2. Strengthen Organisations

The Fund invests in organisations who have identified their unique contribution to social justice and champions their autonomy, integrity and authenticity. The Fund offers wrap-around support to facilitate healthy organisational life spans, in the belief that sustained interventions are essential for systemic change. The concept of organisational strength is subjective, and Comic Relief works with funded partners to identify what ideal operations would look like for them.

3. Build Infrastructure

The Fund works to strengthen the pop culture for social justice ecosystem by facilitating networks and bridging new connections between industries, sectors and actors. As part of this, the Fund encourages connections beyond borders, bringing our funded partners into relationships with diverse collaborators.

The Guiding Principles for the Fund are: **Bold Experimentation, Lived-Experience Led, Adaptability, Patient Collaboration, Collective Learning** and **Radical Love**. More information can be found in the [strategy](#).

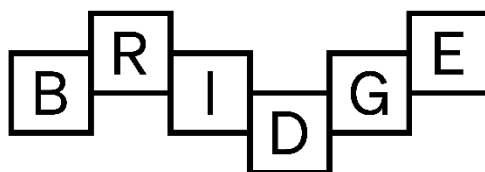
The Power of Pop Fund is investing in organisations that understand the **inherent value of arts, culture and entertainment**, and have refined the use of these tools **to advance justice**. All of the Power of Pop Fund funded partners work on a range of social causes, though a focus on **racial justice and migration justice** offers a starting point and a lens from which the Fund is able to learn. Funded partners also engage in a range of creative modes - from film and TV, to print media. Addressing society's collective values and ways of being is deep work. It requires a reflection on what the public believes to be true and innate. In the context of this deep work, arts, creativity and culture offer strategic tools to consider different ways of being, knowing and experiencing.

The Fund's initial grant investments over the pilot have been awarded to **six funded partners** working at the intersection of popular culture and social change, with a particular focus on migration and racial justice. In mid-2024, three additional organisations were funded as the third cohort. **This report focuses on the experiences of the first two cohorts**, however the work of cohort three will be included in the final Annual Insights Report for year three of the Fund, which is due for publication in mid-2025.

Relevant context

The scope of this report explores the impact of the first two cohorts of funded partners. The first cohort of funded partners, funded from 2022, are as follows:

1. [We Are Bridge \(WAB\)](#) builds a bridge between emerging talent and the industry, supporting contribution in the pop culture space from marginalised groups who may otherwise have limited access to further career development opportunities and/or training.



2. [2POCC](#) is the recently established not-for-profit arm of People of Culture Collective (POCC). It exists to positively improve the lived experiences of creative professionals of colour for now and future generations.



3. [Skin Deep](#) develops digital and physical spaces for Black, people of colour (POC), migrant, refugee and marginalised creatives to work towards justice through cultural production – in print, online and at live events. Across its programmes, Skin Deep explores how to globally build towards racial justice.

SKIN DEEP

The second cohort of funded partners, funded from 2023, are as follows:

1. [Counterpoints Arts](#) aims to amplify the arts by and about migrants and refugees, seeking to ensure that their contributions are recognised and welcomed within British arts, history and culture.

COUNTERPOINTS.

2. [OKRE](#) works strategically to break down barriers and support people to work together, creating fresh and impactful projects. It believes that stories – the ones that create real, social change – are inspired by lived experience, informed by research and driven by entertainment expertise.



3. [Heard](#) works with people and the media to inspire content that changes hearts and minds. They connect media professionals with people who have direct experience of an issue; it supports people to get the best out of media engagements; and it uses insights from research to help storytellers land their message and engage audiences.

“HEARD

At the time of writing, a third cohort of funded partners were being onboarded, to be funded from 2024 onwards. Due to this report covering the period from July 2022 to July 2024, they have not been included within the remit of this report.

Evaluation Remit

In April 2022, Comic Relief brought on an external Learning Coordinator to deliver a collective learning process and an impact evaluation of the Power of Pop Fund. The purpose of the evaluation is **to understand the key lessons, strengths, challenges and opportunities** of the Power of Pop Fund to grow and sustain the popular culture for social justice field in the UK. This report, written by the Learning Coordinator, Saphia Youssef, and a Learning Support Officer, Nairat Ali, covers the first two years of the evaluation from July 2022 to July 2024.

The evaluation takes a developmental learning approach, allowing for real time feedback and iterations. Underlying this approach is the collective learning agenda, which aims to foster and deepen connections within the Power of Pop Fund Community. This Community includes the co-funders, funded partners, Implementation Team (the Portfolio Manager and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager), Strategic Consultant and Community Council. By deepening these connections, the programme endeavours to strengthen and grow the pop culture for social change field in the UK. Much of the Power of Pop Fund's work is about **building and sustaining cultural communities and opening access to networks across and between industries**. Therefore, the Fund considers impact in a cross-sectoral way – i.e. in a way that reflects on how networks are growing, evolving and strengthening over time. This has a bearing on how the Learning Coordinator evaluates the overall programme and its successes.

In April 2023, the Learning Coordinator published an [Evaluation Inception Report](#), outlining the original anticipated learning objectives and evaluation framework for the Power of Pop Fund. Since its development, **the evaluation of the Fund has evolved significantly**. Notably the learning questions have undergone multiple reiterations to reflect changes in the thinking and approach to the evaluation, taking into consideration the time and capacity of the funded partners and to better reflect the interpersonal nature of this work. The key learning questions guiding this report are outlined below, however this is not an exhaustive list.

Key learning questions guiding this report:

- To what extent has the governance of the Power of Pop Fund been driven by lived experience leadership?
- To what extent is the Power of Pop Fund fostering meaningful relationships, both with the Power of Pop Community and the wider ecosystem?
- To what extent are the funded partners testing different approaches to using culture and arts to advance social justice?
- Who have the funded partners directly influenced/impacted in their work?
- What has the Power of Pop Fund investment enabled the funded partners to do?
- What more needs to be done in year three of the Fund to progress towards the new strategy?

METHODOLOGY

As part of the evaluation of the Fund, the Learning Coordinator has reviewed and analysed the **programme's activities, the funded partners' six month and annual reports** and captured learning through **one-to-one interviews and collective learning events** to analyse **key outcomes, challenges and learning**.

As the programme developed, it was evident that evolving the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) approach would refine and aid the programme. As a result, the Learning Coordinator began to implement **Outcomes Harvesting** from December 2023. This participatory approach aims to collect evidence of what has changed ("outcomes") and work backwards to determine whether and how the Power of Pop Fund contributed to these changes.

In light of the new strategy, outcomes statements were formulated in collaboration with the funded partners and the Learning Coordinator identified who the funded partners are aiming to influence, what changes they are impacting and how. **Further insight into the impact of the funded partners' work can be found in the 'Findings' section.**

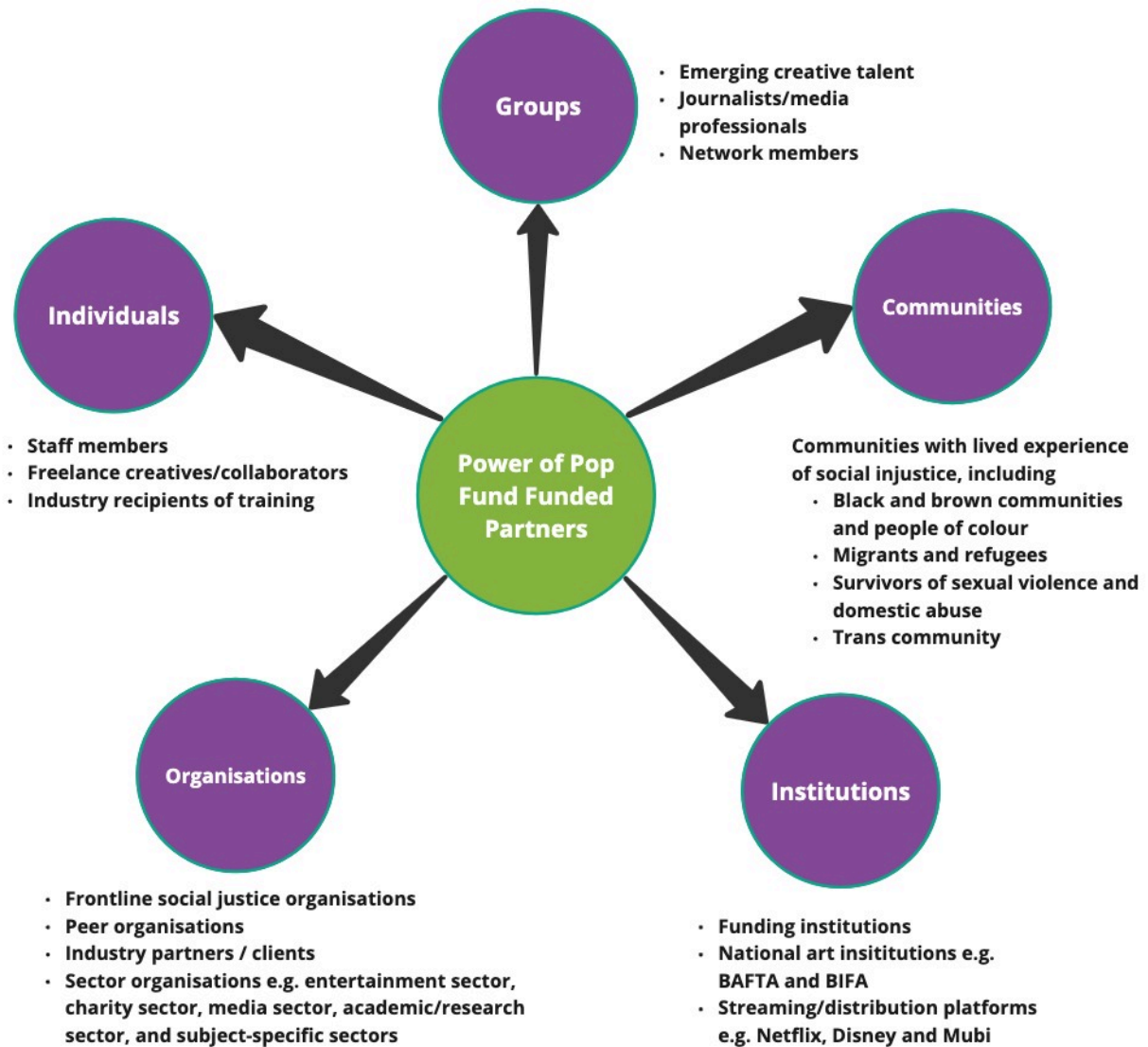
In addition to this:

- two **annual co-funder surveys** have been disseminated to understand what impact the Fund is having on the co-funders' learning and practices.
- four **bi-annual collective learning events** have been hosted, bringing together the co-funders, funded partners, Implementation Team and Community Council (hereafter 'the Power of Pop Fund Community'), to connect, network and share learning.

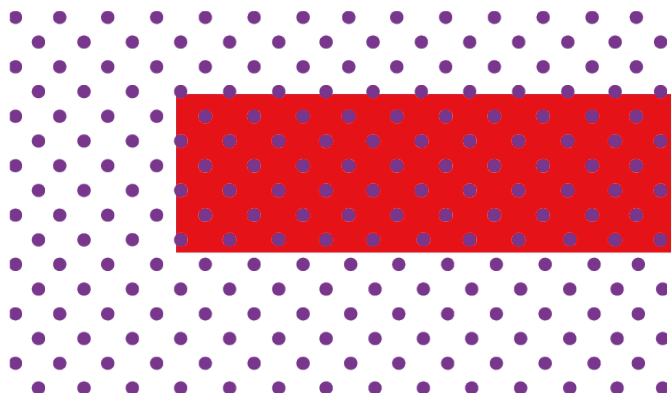
As part of the newly introduced Outcomes Harvesting approach, the Learning Coordinator supported the funded partners to identify their sphere of influence. At the June 2024 collective learning event, the funded partners identified **who they are primarily influencing and impacting in their work**. This is of importance as the pursuit for racial justice, migration justice and narrative shift are systemic in nature. This means there are a range of actors and players who may engage and be influenced by the work of the funded partners. In order to analyse the degree of social impact, it was important to distil the actors so that change over time can be observed.

During the event, the Learning Coordinator found that the actors being influenced by the work of the funded partners **varied significantly** by organisation and it was highlighted that this activity was especially **challenging for organisations working across the ecosystem and/or multiple sectors** as they bring together different social actors to work towards collective impact.

The funded partners' sphere of influence is illustrated in the following diagram.



Once the funded partners had distilled who they have influenced and impacted in their work since joining the Power of Pop Fund, the evaluation continued to identify the methods and approaches through which this influence was occurring. This is reflected in the 'Findings' section of the report.



ACTIVITIES

This section will outline the activities the Power of Pop Fund has conducted over the past two years.

Grant-making - The Power of Pop Fund selected nine funded partners to fund, three in 2022, three in 2023 and three in 2024. In addition, top up funding was given to each of the first six funded partners. For the first cohort of funded partners, selection was guided by three experts by experience. For the third round of funding, the Community Council were tasked with leading on grant-making decisions for cohort three (i.e. who should be funded) based on the newly defined eligibility criteria.

Grant management - Grant management has been the primary activity of the Power of Pop Fund over the past two years. The Portfolio Manager acts as the funded partners' first point of call for discussions, advice and troubleshooting. The funded partners are required to submit six month and annual reports.

Hosting collective learning events - As part of the Learning Coordinator's remit, bi-annual collective learning events have been held with the Power of Pop Fund Community as part of the Fund's wider collective learning agenda. These events aim to provide space for networking and collaboration, capture insights for the evaluation, foster conversations that encourage thought leadership and build a sense of community amongst the Fund's partners. Since the Fund's inception, four collective learning events have been held across the first two years of the Fund, with the intention of facilitating two more by July 2025.

Briefing paper - In April 2023, the Learning Coordinator and Strategic Consultant published a briefing paper, [Building Narrative and Cultural Change Infrastructure in the UK: Learning from inspirational work in the US](#) to gather inspiration and understand what the UK can learn from how infrastructure has been built in the pop culture for social change field in the US.

Curating funder relationships - The co-funders of the Power of Pop Fund have continued to make suggestions on the development of programmatic infrastructure. In September 2023, it was recommended that the Power of Pop Fund establish a lived experience Advisory Board (the 'Community Council'), develop a strategy, a care-centred exit strategy for the existing funded partners, a more communicable and clear understanding of what impact the Fund is aiming to have and how the Learning Coordinator's MEL approach aims to evidence this impact

Onboarding the Community Council - In January 2024, the Power of Pop Fund onboarded a Community Council to establish the future strategy of the Fund and facilitate the selection of an upcoming third cohort of funded partners. This Community Council is made up of five experts with lived experience of racialisation and migration, as well as practical expertise from the creative sectors and a keen mind for justice work. [More details about the Community Council members can be found in this blog.](#)

Devising a strategy - The [2025-2028 strategy](#) was developed by the Portfolio Manager and the Community Council through a collaborative and rigorous writing process. The strategy sets out the Fund's vision, mission, goals and guiding principles, alongside an outline of the programme beyond the pilot. By implementing the learnings from the first two years, this funding strategy aims to enable the Power of Pop Fund to cultivate leadership, strengthen organisations and build infrastructure in the pop culture for social justice field.

Hosting the first Power of Pop Fund Mixer - In April 2024, The Power of Pop Fund hosted its first mixer event, bringing together approximately 70 social justice practitioners, artists, academics, funders, friends and colleagues interested in the potential of pop culture as a tool for racial and migrant justice. The Mixer had two main motivations: it was an informal expression of interest event for organisations interested in being funded as part of cohort three. The second motivation of the Mixer was to bring together organisations who are interested in exploring innovative, dynamic and collaborative approaches to racial and migrant justice.

Funder plus support - In year two of the Power of Pop Fund, the Portfolio Manager led on developing a funder plus offer for the funded partners. This was developed through studying what the funded partners reported they needed in their six-month reports, annual reports and one-to-one interviews with the Learning Coordinator. So far, two areas of funder plus support have been implemented:

MEL workshops - the Learning Coordinator identified gaps in the funded partners' knowledge and expertise around MEL and what challenges they were facing around demonstrating their impact. The Learning Coordinator worked with the Implementation Team to co-develop support that was responsive to the funded partners' needs and it was agreed that the Fund would pay for the Learning Coordinator to provide up to one day of MEL support to each funded partner. Two MEL workshops have been held so far with We Are Bridge.

Creativity Does Good Dinner - In March 2024, the Portfolio Manager organised a dinner with the leaders of the funded partner organisations, representatives of the Community Council, the Power of Pop Fund's Strategic Consultant and sector leaders from Walt Disney Studios, Arts Council England, Silk Road Slippers, The London Screen Academy, Aspen Institute and British Film Institute. This group of funders, academics, charity organisations, and creative corporations all came together to answer the question - how can we use creativity, entertainment and art to advance racial and migrant justice?

Developing a framework - In February 2024, the Power of Pop Fund commissioned Radicle Development to produce [Pop Culture for Social Justice: A foundational framework](#). The purpose of the Framework is to better understand how strategic funding interventions could advance pop culture as a tool used for social justice. Creation of the framework was commissioned to underpin the Fund's future work and capture current understanding of spaces and flows influencing change in the field of pop culture for social justice. The framework also establishes common definitions for key terms (e.g. 'pop culture' vs 'popular culture' vs 'mainstream culture' etc.)

Public Speaking and Engagement - Over the course of the last year, in order to expand the reputation and awareness of the Fund, the Portfolio Manager has engaged in a public speaking function. This has included collaborations with the AKO Storytelling Institute - [Storytelling As A Force For Good: Mr Bates vs The Post Office](#); and Philanthropy Together, Pop Culture Collaborative and Africa No Filter - [Narrative Harm to Narrative Power](#).

Disseminating the Power of Pop Fund Newsletter - The newsletter was first disseminated in February 2024 to 163 stakeholders to share updates on the Fund's work, including case studies of the funded partners, public facing blogs about the Fund's activities and thought pieces.



Photographer: Derick Armah

FINDING

What has the Power of Pop Fund achieved to date?

The evaluation found that the past two years have led to the following four areas of impact:

1. **Increased organisational capacity and expertise**
2. **Increased engagement and participation of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects/spaces across the Fund**
3. **Increased collaborations and partnerships**
4. **Advanced sharing of skills, expertise and learning within and across sectors**

The following sections outline how each of these outcomes have been achieved through the funded partners' work and programmatic activities. The different models, approaches and ways of working that each funded partner has taken to create change are highlighted within the spotlight case studies.

1. Increased organisational capacity and expertise

Through the Fund's investment, the funded partners identified increased organisational capacity and expertise as a key outcome that they have all achieved since joining the Fund. This has led to greater **changes in their day-to-day work** through **hiring new staff and establishing new policies and practices**. In addition, for one funded partner, this outcome has been supported by engaging in MEL support provided by the Learning Coordinator.

The Fund's capacity and expertise has also been strengthened since its inception through the **development of a strategy** and **devising a framework**.

1a. Organisational capacity through new hires

Through the Fund's investment many of the funded partners have been able to hire senior staff members to provide technical and strategic guidance as their organisation grows. The funded partners highlighted that with new staff comes access to new networks and connections, enabling them to both strengthen their organisational capacity and expertise and build infrastructure.

A range of roles have been recruited by the funded partners including:

- Managing Directors/Editors
- Programme Leads/support staff
- HR/Operations/Legal/Finance roles
- Marketing/comms/social media staff
- Evaluation and Impact support

1b. Improving organisational capacity through establishing new policies and practices

Funded partners have also improved their organisation's structure, policies and practices as a result of the Fund's investment, including:

- Strengthening governance systems e.g. defining roles/responsibilities, creating an Advisory Board or Board of Trustees.
- Creating strategic plans e.g. business plans and financial plans.
- Embedding new policies and practices e.g. around safeguarding, liability, GDPR, online security, working culture and mediation.
- Seeking external expertise e.g. legal, branding, comms, marketing, fundraising and strategy development.

These activities aim to strengthen organisational capacity by enabling the funded partners to build core infrastructure that, in the long term, will support their sustainability. These activities focus on implementing robust and rigorous internal mechanisms that support the smooth running of the funded partners' organisation and their activities.

The Learning Coordinator found that improved organisational capacity is most evident amongst the first cohort of funded partners, whose work can be considered more grassroots or frontline compared to the second cohort. Although the second cohort are considered more established, they viewed organisational strengthening as cyclical and ongoing.



“We understand that as a very young organisation, there’s so much internal organisational stuff that we weren’t able to implement during our beginnings that we have now been able to begin completing (e.g. a business plan, [defining our] mission, income streams and setting up internal systems).”

- Funded partner from Cohort 1

The case study below illustrates how one funded partner, Skin Deep, has strengthened their organisational capacity and expertise through establishing and embedding new policies and practices within their organisation.

Spotlight case study: Skin Deep

Skin Deep has invested significant time and resources into establishing radical frameworks, policies and practices within their organisation.

Through this work, Skin Deep have achieved the following outcomes:

- **Strengthened organisational policies and practices**
- **Increased opportunities for peer-learning across the sector**

This is evidenced by the development of their safeguarding policy that goes beyond the set of state-mandated measures, to imagine a broader picture of safety for themselves and all those they work with.

Whereas mainstream safeguarding approaches often uphold problematic power dynamics, encouraging surveillance, control and punishment, Skin Deep's approach to safeguarding includes research on language, procedures and resources that align with their values.

The radical safeguarding policy sits alongside Skin Deep other organisational strengthening work: developing new contracts for freelancers, contributors and PAYE staff and establishing a new role card system that uses a fluid and non-hierarchical structure to set out clear accountabilities for team members, and factors in collaborative working practices, which was inspired by the work of [Dark Matters Lab](#).

Skin Deep has shared their approach to radical safeguarding with **4-5 peer organisations** directly and so far, the response has been positive. In addition, Skin Deep held an online event with **5 attendees** in June 2024, as part of an informal series of co-learning events to share their role card system with peer organisations. The recording of this event will shortly be made available on Skin Deep's website to maximise reach.



"The Power of Pop Fund has enabled Skin Deep to think about how we are structured, where accountability lies and invest in resourcing, while also being collaborative."

- Skin Deep staff member



"I love the contract format and safeguarding policies. I am so impressed with how well Skin Deep's values shine through."

- New hire



"This contract is so well written and structured, clearly a lot of time and consideration has been put into it. Never thought I'd say reading contracts would be a positive experience but here we are!"

- New hire



Artist name: FACESOUL
Skin Deep Sonic Transmissions 2023 taking place at Roundhouse
Photographer name: Chuko (website <http://www.thephotocrib.com/>)

1c. Strengthening funded partners' MEL

The Learning Coordinator worked with the Implementation Team to co-develop support to increase the funded partners' capacity and expertise around Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL). The first MEL workshop was delivered to We Are Bridge (WAB) in May 2024, which focused on building their understanding of MEL and why it is important, refining their organisational vision and mission, defining who they are influencing and impacting in their work and identifying short-, medium- and long-term outcomes for their two streams of work.

WAB reflected that the workshop was productive and insightful as it enabled them to gain clarity on their objectives and created new thought pathways about their approach to delivery. However, they felt that more time was needed to dive deeper into how to improve their existing monitoring and evaluation processes and come away with tangible next steps. On request of the funded partner, the Learning Coordinator provided further MEL support to WAB in a second workshop in August 2024.



"I often find evaluations and the approach to this type of thinking really challenging and this session has been so accessible and amazing at demystifying this. It's made me want to do this with my own creative practices too."

- WAB staff member

1d. Strengthening the Fund's capacity and expertise

At a programme level, the Fund's capacity and expertise has been increased through the development of two key outputs:

- **The development of the strategy**
- **Devising a Framework**

Development of the strategy

Through monthly workshops the Community Council reflected on what the Power of Pop Fund has established through its pilot phase, including the anticipated learning objectives, how the Fund aims to demonstrate impact and the direction of the Fund going forward. The Council was given space to interrogate this approach and make practical decisions about the direction of the Fund, whilst being visionary in defining the change that the Fund wants to achieve. This resulted in the [Power of Pop Fund Strategy for 2025-2028](#), which sets out a robust and achievable programme that can contribute meaningfully to advancing the pop culture for social justice field in the UK.



“[A key highlight of the strategy development process was] being able to write something concrete to define real funding for real organisations in a space that’s groundbreaking.”

- Community Council member

In order to achieve the outlined goals, the Community Council agreed that future funding should be directed in two main ways:

1. The majority of funding will constitute **three-to-five-year organisational grants** for funded partners who are selected against the Fund's eligibility criteria and score highly against the preferred criteria. Eligibility and preferred criteria can be found on pages 10-11 of the [strategy](#).
2. Secondly, the Fund will be allocating funding towards **activities that build infrastructure**, such as hosting events, conducting research and facilitating networking spaces that aid knowledge sharing.

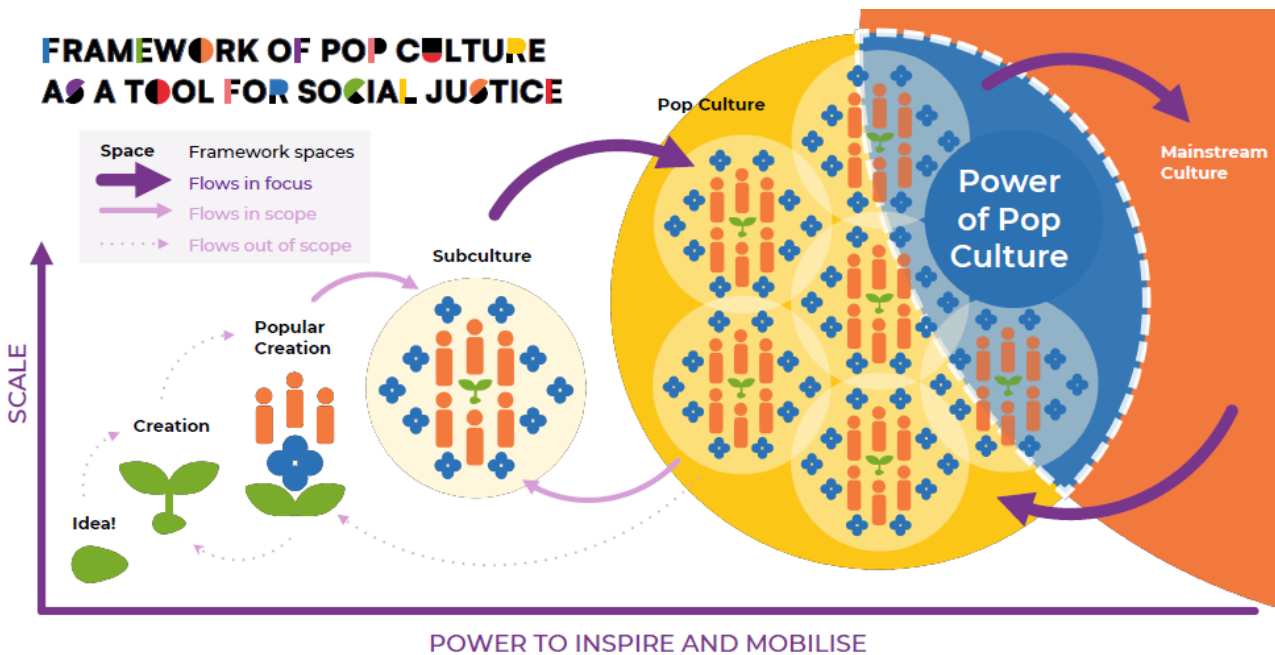
As part of the strategy development, the Learning Coordinator also revised the learning questions for the Fund to set out a robust approach for demonstrating the impact of this work. These can be found on pages 13-16 of the strategy.

The development of the strategy, including the revised learning questions, is critical for three key reasons:

1. **Creating confidence** - existing funded partners who may want to renew funding can have a better understanding of the future direction of the Fund and use the strategy to communicate their impact.
2. **Offering transparency** - for prospective funded partners, the strategy provides clarity about the Fund and will enable them to make informed decisions about applying for funding in the future.
3. **Encouraging collective ownership** - drawing on participatory methods, including those embedded within the collective learning events, the new strategy enables the Power of Pop Community to see how their suggestions have been taken onboard. This may encourage co-funders to reinvest in a pooled fund where collective ownership is key.

Devising a Framework

In Spring 2024, the Power of Pop Fund commissioned Radicle Development to produce [Pop Culture for Social Justice: A foundational framework](#). A snapshot of the Framework appears below:



A pop culture for social justice story

Idea	Popular Creation	Subculture	Pop Culture	Mainstream Culture
<p>Idea Universal housing</p> <p>Creation A designer creates a new video game where the player must build housing for all, though not everyone can pay.</p>	<p>The game is widely reviewed and shared among board gamers. Outside of this community, people have no idea it exists.</p>	<p>Gamers begin using the game's jargon, making jokes relevant to the characters, and wearing t-shirts and other merchandise with the game's artwork.</p>	<p>People who have never played the game are wearing the t-shirts. A singer references the game in her lyrics. New slang pops up and the release of an expansion is widely covered in the news.</p>	<p>In part because of the game's popularity, a majority of the population is interested in new ways to provide housing for all and people in power can reference ideas from the game in creating and gaining support for housing policies.</p>

Through the development of the framework, the Fund established a clear strategy around funding activities and programmes that sit within the **subculture**. The Community Council highlighted that the rationale behind this came from a discussion around where power lies. It was agreed that power brokers within pop culture are looking to the subculture for stories to create change, so the emphasis for the Fund should be supporting those in the subculture to have an impact on pop culture. While the Fund currently focuses on migration and racial justice, the framework presented can be applied to intersecting focus areas, such as issues of climate justice, gender equity and youth justice.

The framework is intentionally foundational and iterative; it will need to be tested through the funded partners' work and by the wider ecosystem to continue to evolve.



"I think we always have a challenge with the Fund in that there is a tendency to confuse the work of the grant holders with the work on mainstream cultural change. We hope they might make some kind of contribution - but that is not how the success of their work will be measured, I think the new framework articulates this really well."

- Co-funder

The development of the Foundational Framework is helping to strengthen the Fund and the wider pop culture for social justice field by:

- **Establishing and defining complex ideas and terms relating to pop culture** - through defining common terms, such as 'popular creation', 'pop culture', 'sub-culture' and 'mainstream culture', the Framework has made these concepts tangible and comprehensive to audiences within and outside of the field.
- **Situating 'community' at the heart of the work** - by ensuring that the work is grounded and rooted in the people with the lived experience of the issues the Fund seeks to address, the Framework presents a stepping stone towards the potential for greater engagement around community organising – i.e. the potential for culture makers and community organisers to work together to effect large-scale change.
- **Supporting prospective funders** – the Framework helps potential funders to understand where they can align their funding, for example by investing in organisations creating new, imaginative creative content, rather than trying to work solely within the existing entertainment sector, where all too frequently there are blocks on diverse talent.

Key takeaways

- Through recruiting and retaining staff, the funded partners are better able to meet the growing demand for their services by providing capacity for internal administration and project delivery, and by enabling the organisations to work towards their missions.
- Through establishing new policies and practices the funded partners are building the foundations needed to sustain their organisations in the long-term. Skin Deep has demonstrated how through strengthening their organisational policies and practices, it has benefited both their core team and peer organisations, illustrating the wider impact of this outcome.
- The creation of the Fund's strategy for 2025-2028 solidified the Fund's future focus and direction and increased the Implementation Team's ability to communicate how the Fund intends to drive forward this work beyond the end of the pilot.
- The development of the framework has increased the Fund's understanding of how pop and mainstream culture are created and maintained and who has the power to craft, tell, and spread stories so that a more socially just world can be built.
- Through providing MEL support, the Learning Coordinator has increased WAB's organisational expertise around MEL and sowed the seeds for WAB to better communicate their strategic contribution and impact.

2. Increased engagement and participation of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects/spaces across the Fund

The Fund intends to sustain the key activities of the funded partners and encourage new opportunities that widen access, and participation, of people of colour and marginalised communities in the arts, culture and entertainment sectors. The intended aim is to leave positive imprints and lasting legacies in and across institutions as outlined in Goal 1 of the Fund's strategy, to cultivate community leadership.

This outcome has been achieved through funding organisations 'led by and for' systemically marginalised communities, widening access to development opportunities for creatives of colour and creatives from marginalised communities and delivering direct support.

2a. Funding organisations 'led by and for' organisations

Increasing engagement and participation of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects and spaces has fundamentally been achieved by the Fund's grant-making, which primarily funds organisations led by people from systematically marginalised communities, for people from systemically marginalised communities.

Of the first six organisations funded:

- **all six** have **people of colour in leadership** (at governance or executive level)
- **five** have **female** founders, co-founders or board members

Through the strategy development process, the Community Council established the thread between cohort one and two's work and identified potential opportunities to further diversify the types of organisations currently being funded, e.g. by deciding to fund organisations based outside of London. This enabled the Fund to take a portfolio approach to awarding cohort three, meaning the Community Council looked across all of the existing grants to ensure the Fund is supporting a diversity of organisation sizes, art mediums and geographical locations.



"Cohort three complimented the other funded partners but offered something bold and new."

- Community Council member



2b. Widening access to development opportunities

The funded partners' work around this outcome has largely involved **increasing access to development opportunities for people of colour and marginalised communities within the creative sectors**. Four out of six of the current funded partners are delivering activities, which aim to provide more creative opportunities to racialised and marginalised creatives in the next six months to a year. Some funded partners are already achieving this.

Through increasing engagement and participation of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects/spaces, the funded partners identified that this impacted a range of actors, including **individuals, groups and communities**.

The case study below highlights how 2POCC is achieving this outcome through nurturing a community of creatives and facilitating opportunities for individual members to grow professionally.

Spotlight: 2POCC

From their inception, 2POCC has aimed to give Global Majority creatives a national platform to connect, build a sense of community and access events and opportunities to positively transform the industry and beyond.

2POCC's community of filmmakers, writers, directors, photographers, producers and crew spanning various genres has grown to over **1,500 members** across 8 WhatsApp groups internationally. They have **2,870+ Mailchimp** subscribers across the UK and Amsterdam and a talent base of **325 members** who have signed up to hear about paid project opportunities through POCC Studios and Productions.



Still from [ROBÉRT](#), a short film funded by 2POCC and Shutterstock
Photographer: Louis G Brennan

Through their work, 2POCC are currently achieving the following outcomes:

- **Black and Brown creatives have increased access to development opportunities within the creative sectors e.g. access to funding, mentorship, training etc.**
- **There is increased access to positive, culturally appropriate spaces for Black and Brown creatives to network and share creativity and inspiration.**
- **There is increased sense of power and agency for community members.**

One example of how 2POCC supports creatives of colour to access development opportunities is through their brand partnership with [Hoala](#), which aims to help would-be advertising professionals break into the industry. Through the brand partnership, they offer one applicant a year a full scholarship for the prestigious Hoala Brand Strategy Masterclass course, alongside mentoring sessions for three runners up with a Hoala lecturer of their choosing. Registered 2POCC members from across Europe are actively encouraged to apply for the nine-week course, which aims to provide participants with a powerful strategic theory base and vast practical knowledge focused on the day-to-day tasks of a strategist. Alongside this, 2POCC has also put forward 2POCC speakers to APA to become lecturers on the course, further diversifying their speaker line up.

Impact:

- **Three** scholarships awarded since inception
- Connected **six** runner ups with Hoala one-to-one mentorship
- Paid opportunities for **two** 2POCC speakers to join the course
- Positive testimonials from attendees



“The course was amazing. I found it beneficial because of the content, connections and perception...Not only was it a chance to connect with industry leaders but also to be introduced to a group of amazing minds all practicing within advertising across countries, experience and disciplines...being awarded a scholarship to such a highly-regarded course immediately made agency fold take note and subsequently listen to my contributions which was a turning point not to be overlooked”.

- Hoala scholarship awardee

2c. Providing direct support to creatives

Another way in which the funded partners are increasing engagement and participation of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects and spaces is through providing direct support to creatives. The case study below illustrates how WAB are achieving this outcome through delivering a programme of development and support for a cohort of up-and-coming creatives.

Spotlight: We Are Bridge (WAB)

At the end of 2024, WAB took on a new contract with the [British Independent Films Awards \(BIFA\)](#), supporting nominees in their Breakthrough Performance category. The programme ran for six months (finishing in May 2024) and involved supporting the BIFA cohort around casting, career development, developing financial skills, and navigating the industry. Through the Power of Pop investment, WAB have been able to support these artists, their own labour costs, and pay for freelance contributors for bespoke sessions.

For this stream of work, WAB achieved the following outcomes during their six month programme:

- **Increased knowledge around 'cultural capital' (culture of the creative industries e.g. cultural institutions)**
- **Strengthened performance skills and abilities e.g. ability to audition, read scripts etc.**
- **Increased confidence of financial literacy**
- **Increased sense of belonging in the industry**



Kosar Ali at BIFA Award Ceremony 2023 Credit Knoteck - Shutterstock

Impact:

Following the end of the BIFA programme:

- **46%** of cohort members rated their knowledge of the sector as a **4 on a 5-point scale**, in comparison to **28%** at the start of the programme.
- **83%** of cohort members rated themselves as having **'quite high'** acting skills, in comparison to **50%** at the start of the programme.
- **50%** rated their ability to audition **'quite high'** compared to **16%** at the start of the programme.
- **50%** rated their ability to read a payslip **'quite high'** compared to **16%** at the start of the programme.
- **50%** of cohort members **'strongly agreed'** that they feel working as an actor is attainable / possible for them in comparison to **0%** at the start of the programme.

Key takeaways

- The engagement of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects and spaces has inherently been achieved through awarding funding to organisations led by systematically marginalised communities. This in turn has supported the funded partners to facilitate and deliver opportunities to support other creatives from diverse backgrounds.
- The two case studies illustrate the different ways in which the funded partners are increasing engagement and participation of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects and spaces. Interestingly, both organisations have been able to achieve this outcome through brand partnerships, illustrating the importance of increased collaborations and partnerships for this kind of work.

3. Increased collaborations and partnerships

Through the Power of Pop Fund investment, all of the funded partners reported that they have been able to **increase collaborations and partnerships** within the wider ecosystem in which they work, linking with Goal 3 of the Fund, to build infrastructure. This was highlighted as a key outcome that the funded partners are currently achieving, however it was also identified as an outcome that the funded partners intend to continue progressing in the short, medium and long-term.

This outcome has been achieved through facilitating peer-learning, delivering collaborative projects and creating opportunities to foster relationships across the pop culture for social change ecosystem.

3a. Facilitating peer-learning

One way in which the funded partners are increasing collaborations and partnerships within the sectors they work in is through providing advice and support to creatives and peer organisations and participating in learning exchanges. The funded partners identified that achieving this outcome has primarily led to **changes in relationships** between peer organisations in the field.

One example of this is the launch of Skin Deep's informal series of peer co-learning events. Most recently, Skin Deep held an event, [PLAYMAKING: Radical frameworks for creating a magazine](#), which aimed to share their learnings and reflections around implementing radical frameworks for creating the 10th issue of their print magazine, which explored the theme of play as a tool for reimagining, resisting and release.



“Expect to hear about the highs and the lows: how a playshop kicked off the process, the realities and challenges of implementing radical frameworks, what we’re proudest of, our most common pitfalls and oversights (we did them so you don’t have to xoxo), and some radical transparency about money!”

- Skin Deep’s promotion of the event

The free, public learning session was attended by **22** individuals and an article using the recording of the event will be shared on their website as a permanent resource that creatives and organisations can draw on going forward.

3b. Delivering collaborative projects with creatives and/or industry partners

Another way in which the funded partners are increasing collaborations and partnerships within the sectors they work is through delivering a diverse range of collaborative projects with creatives and industry partners, including co-facilitating events, workshops, creating networks, campaigns, and collaborating with media professionals around narrative/script development.



“This Play issue has been a huge inspiration in terms of a visual identity and design. Kids deserve epic publications, one that look and feel like Skin Deep’s do.”

- Playmaking event attendee

The second cohort of funded partners have influenced a greater number of social actors in this space due to the nature of their work, which is inherently cross-sectoral and/or focused on advancing work across the ecosystem.



“As a network/membership organisation...we highlight work that others are doing and foster an ecosystem that enables everyone to learn from each other. We identify what is missing and needed, facilitating opportunities and spaces to share learning between individuals, organisations and sectors.”

- Funded partner

The case study below illustrates how Heard is facilitating collaboration and partnership between people with lived experience and media professionals through their Media Movers Programme.

Spotlight: Heard

Through Heard’s work with media and creative professionals, people with lived experience and impact-driven communicators, they have made significant progress towards the following outcomes:

- **Increased media professionals’ ability to create stories and narratives that spark change.**
- **Increased engagement and participation of people with lived experience in creating narratives for social change.**
- **Increased networking opportunities between media professionals and people with lived experience.**

In 2022-2023, Heard sparked stories that were heard and seen up to **53 million times** – about poverty, climate change, migration, domestic abuse, sexual violence, transgender experiences and children’s palliative care.

In the same year Heard trained and/or supported:

- **1,179** media & creative industry professionals
- **139** people with lived experience
- **568** charity professionals & other impact-driven communicators



“Even though we all had different experiences to talk about, there was that similarity: the desire for change in how our areas of focus are being perceived and translated in media and television”.

- Network member



“When I see myself represented on screen, I feel the joy of being seen and that people know I am here and matter. We need stories that do this more and we need them to drown out the negativity”.

- Media Mover

In their [Media Movers programme](#), part of their anti-racism work, Heard aims to communicate better and more authentic stories around migration in popular culture. As part of this programme, Heard has created a network of young people with direct experience of migration who are passionate about influencing media representation of migration. Alongside this, Heard collaborates with media professionals including journalists, TV and audio producers who are interested in growing their understanding of how race and migration are intertwined, and rethinking how these stories are presented in the media.

Media Movers brings these groups together in supportive spaces to share perspectives and work towards more equitable portrayals in media.

Developing the programme has led Media Movers to work with a range of partners including, Vice, Grazia and ITV and it has inspired investigative reporting by The Times and The Sunday Times and podcasts, such as BBC Sounds' The Next Episode and BBC Radio 1Xtra Talks.

Since then, Heard have begun development of a [new resource](#) in collaboration with [The Runnymede Trust](#) to improve representations of race and migration.



Two out of six of the funded partners recognised that through their collaborations and partnerships they are aiming to **increase understanding and capability to measure the impact of narrative change on public understanding** in the medium- to long-term. This sits alongside a desire to **increase understanding of how to leverage popular culture to advance public understanding of social issues**. However, the evidence shared by the funded partners suggests that implementing changes in practice is 'easier' to achieve in the short-term, in comparison to changes that influence behavioural change or sector-wide impact, which is typically fostered using trust and time.

3c. Creating opportunities to foster relationships across the pop culture for social change ecosystem

In the last year, the Fund has played a greater role in building infrastructure in comparison to the first year of the pilot. This has involved organising and facilitating opportunities that foster collaboration and partnerships across the pop culture for social change ecosystem. One example of this is the Power of Pop Fund Mixer.

Power of Pop Mixer

Through holding the Mixer, the Fund's Implementation Team aimed to mitigate some of the inadvertent harms of traditional practices in funding application and selection approaches. by convening a group of interested organisations together. The expression of interest event took a radically different approach to dismantle barriers to access, personalise the process and create the opportunity for organisations to bring their work to life. However, in practice taking this radical and new approach may have reinforced inequitable funding practices due to the lack of clear communication around the grant-making process for cohort three (see page 49 for learnings). Nonetheless, the Mixer as a networking event was successful in achieving its aims of bringing organisations together that are interested in exploring innovative, dynamic and collaborative approaches to racial and migrant justice and there is clear appetite to continue these events.

Attendees at the Mixer responded to the question: **How would you describe the feel of this event?** The word cloud below represents their responses.



“As someone who enjoys art and who is on the peripherals of social justice work, this event was so insightful and inspiring! The Power of Pop Fund should definitely invest in more events and spaces like this – to ultimately make community and social justice more tangible. Keep doing the work!”

- Mixer attendee

Key takeaways

- All funded partners have experienced a growth in their collaborations and partnerships as a result of the Fund's investment, illustrating the key role the Fund is playing in building infrastructure in the pop culture for social change field in the UK.
- Through fostering collaborations and partnerships, the funded partners are growing and sharing their organisational expertise, increasing cross-sector working and supporting people of colour and marginalised communities to participate in pop culture and narrative change work.
- The learning from the Fund's first Mixer event presents an opportunity for the Fund to play a larger role in building infrastructure through creating opportunities for community-building and fostering thought leadership.

4. Advanced sharing of skills, expertise and learning within and across sectors

Through the Fund's investment, the funded partners identified **advanced sharing of skills, expertise and learning within and across the sector** as another key outcome that they have achieved since the Fund's inception. This outcome has been achieved at both a funded partner level and programme level through sharing learning around the Fund, holding collective learning events, growing interest in funding pop culture for social change work and the funded partners' delivery of infrastructure activities.

It is important to note that this outcome has significant overlap with increased organisational capacity and expertise and increased collaborations and partnerships, however it was agreed by the funded partners that advanced sharing of skills, expertise and learning within and across sectors is distinct from the other outcomes identified.

4a. Sharing learning around the Fund

The Fund has been successful, particularly in its second year, in sharing updates and learnings with a wide number of stakeholders with a vested interest in this work. For example, the **Power of Pop Fund newsletter** was first disseminated in February 2024 to **163 stakeholders** to share updates on the Fund's work, including case studies of the funded partners, public facing blogs about the Fund's activities and thought pieces.

In addition, over the course of the last year, the Portfolio Manager has increased awareness around the Fund through public speaking and engagement, including at a talk hosted by the AKO Storytelling Institute, [Storytelling As A Force For Good: Mr Bates vs The Post Office](#), and another hosted by Philanthropy Together, Pop Culture Collaborative and Africa No Filter, [Narrative Harm to Narrative Power](#).

Through sharing learning around the Fund, the Implementation Team has helped:

- **expand the reputation and awareness of the Fund;**
- **create a sense of community where one did not exist in the UK previously and;**
- **galvanise interest in and support for pop culture for social change work.**

This has been enabled by the presence of a Strategic Consultant who has worked in this sector for seven years and has built a wide network of contacts whose details she has shared with the Power of Pop Fund as part of a growing dissemination list. It has also been enabled by a highly proactive Portfolio Manager who has been instrumental in driving forward external communication.

4b. Holding collective learning events

The collective learning events have played a fundamental role in advancing the sharing of skills, expertise and learning between the Power of Pop Fund Community. Through these spaces, the funded partners have been supported to understand how their work overlaps and where there are opportunities for alignment. Although formal collaborations and partnerships between funded partners are yet to be seen, a sense of community has been built and there are examples of the funded partners supporting each other's work, such as [Counterpoint Arts 2024 Refugee Week events](#), which multiple funded partners attended.

When asked, **'what were your favourite sections of the February 2024 collective learning event'**, one partner mentioned:



"The team working exercises, particularly creating a drawing as a stimulus to discuss the aims and objectives of a "five years from now" world. I found it very inspiring and enriching to hear what other organisations think on these areas. I also learnt how others think which is a real skills builder".

- Power of Pop Fund Community Member

In addition, the collective learning events have presented a unique opportunity for the co-funders to have face-to-face time with the funded partners to hear about how their work is progressing first hand, rather than solely through the evaluation. Funded partners have also been able to challenge the Fund's thinking, practices and ways of working to drive positive changes, illustrating the importance of the participatory nature of these spaces.

4c. Growing interest in funding pop culture for social change work

Since being part of the Power of Pop Fund, several of the co-funders have also launched funding initiatives around the arts, creativity and narrative and cultural change sectors. Although the launch of these funding initiatives cannot be directly attributed to the Power of Pop Fund, it illustrates how the Fund's work can play a key role in bolstering and sharing learning to refine the co-funders' other funding initiatives in the fields of arts, creativity and cultural shift.

For example, Paul Hamlyn Foundation relaunched their [Arts Fund](#) with new criteria and a new vision, focusing more on the role of arts in the context of social change, which offers new possibilities to support organisations in the narrative change space. In February 2024, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation also launched the [Youth Creativity Fund](#), which aims to support work led by and for young people who have less access to creative programmes or who are underrepresented in arts and culture.



Photographer: Derick Armah



“Being involved in these conversations has helped open my eyes to the possibility of narrative change work being a key part of leveraging positive social change, it's also helped me understand the porous boundaries of the work and how we can support an ecology of practice. I think the strategy work the team has done has been particularly inspiring, offering a really clear way of understanding how the field can lever change - which feels like an important contribution to the field. It's giving us more confidence to embed this way of working and thinking.”

- Co-funder

4d. Infrastructure activities delivered by the funded partners

The funded partners have advanced the sharing of skills, expertise and learning through a range of activities aimed at bridging new connections between industries, sectors and actors and strengthening the ecosystems in which they work. This includes:

- **Hosting retreats and events**, such as OKRE's annual summit, bringing together speakers from across film, social media, games, audio, television, academic research and charities.
- **Building networks and communities**, such as 2POCC's WhatsApp groups with 1500 members spanning the UK, US, Netherlands and more.
- **Sector specific projects**, such as Heard's work around palliative care, which facilitates collaboration between key individuals and organisations working in the children's palliative care sector (including clinicians, professionals, hospices and the NHS) and the media.

Four out of six funded partners identified that advancing sharing of skills, expertise and learning within and across sectors had the most social impact on **organisations**, including both their own organisations and other organisations in their networks. However, narrowing down who the funded partners have influenced through this outcome was particularly challenging for the second cohort, who highlighted that their work largely involves linking together different social actors and working cross-sectorally.

The case study below illustrates how one funded partner has advanced sharing of skills, expertise and learning through a range of infrastructure activities.

Spotlight: Counterpoints Arts

Since joining the Power of Pop Fund in April 2023, Counterpoints Arts has achieved the following outcomes through their work:

- **Increased partnerships and collaborations with organisations across the arts and migration sectors.**
- **Increased representation of migrant and displaced communities in creative spaces/popular culture.**
- **Increased access to leadership and development opportunities, e.g. training, workshops, events for displaced people / refugees.**

Counterpoints has been intentional in their approach of skills sharing through the open opportunities they host and organise, such as during Refugee Week, mentoring and learning sessions and wider development opportunities.



"I am really excited about this work because we can see so much potential... We are at the beginning of this conversation."

– Counterpoints Arts

In June 2024, Counterpoints held key activities across Refugee Week including their annual conference, reaching hundreds of organisations in their networks.

Impact:

- Social media promotions for Refugee Week 2024 were played **48k times** on the Counterpoints Instagram page and **189k times** on the Refugee Week Instagram page.
- Their collaborative post with Other Cinemas to promote the Refugee Week film programme reached **31k views**.
- Their Refugee Week advert was played before several films at BFI, BAFTA, Glastonbury and more.
- They held **eight** training sessions for their internal team, some of which were shared with partners and arts professionals in their networks.

Additionally, Counterpoints have widened their **Talent Development Programme** through encouraging new and upcoming creative artists to participate and benefit from expert mentoring. The programme seeks to offer development opportunities, ongoing support, advice and connections to over **60 artists and organisations**.

Their approach is tailored to reflect the needs of the diverse communities they work with and aims to bring more representation to the public realm. To achieve this, Counterpoints have also developed the **Learning Lab Programme**, which offers peer-to-peer learning sessions with a variety of partners and encourages artists to attend a summer school. The latter is in partnership with [Create Ireland](#) and [Beyond The Now](#).

Overall, the number of migrant or displaced creatives involved in their creative projects and spaces has exceeded expectations. The annual target set in their business plan and funder targets was **75** but the true number is likely much higher when you include the wider wrap-around support offered, including conversations, informal mentoring and more.

This process has been enabled by the recruitment of **five staff** for the UK team (full and part-time).

The case study below illustrates how another funded partner has advanced sharing of skills, expertise and learning through delivery of infrastructure activities.

Spotlight: OKRE

Since joining the Power of Pop Fund in April 2023, OKRE has achieved the following outcomes through their work:

- **Increased collaborations between the charity, research, social impact and entertainment sectors.**
- **Increased cross-sectoral knowledge around how content can have a social impact (and social impact research).**
- **Increased representation of diverse narratives in entertainment (i.e. from commissioning entertainment projects).**
- **Increased thought leadership and knowledge exchange between sectors.**
- **Increased staff expertise (through new hires).**

In April 2024, OKRE hosted the [OKRE Summit](#), bringing together speakers from across the film, social media, games, audio, television, academic research and charity sectors. The Summit was attended by **168 individuals** who engaged in a deep dive into how the social and cultural impact of entertainment can be enhanced.

The Summit invited **47 speakers** to participate in panel discussions and presentations, **68%** of whom were **female**, **32% male** and **34%** people of the **Global Majority**.



“I want to acknowledge how incredible it is...to bring everyone under the same roof, from commissioning editors to filmmakers to activists to writers. I think the traditional way of having a conference is very outdated. I think bringing people together and chatting and showing work and playing clips and talking about what they do as well, eventually leads to change, because we all have to change...Everyone is here describing a problem, but they're also talking about how do we change? How do we do this? So OKRE's work is, I think, a stepping stone in making that change possible.”

- Hassan Akkad, filmmaker, photojournalist and activist at the OKRE Summit

In April 2022, OKRE launched the [Entertainment Industries Taskforce on Social Impact](#), bringing together industry leaders with research and impact organisations. The Taskforce aims to provide an opportunity to understand and build on the real-world impact of people engaging with entertainment content. It currently has **13 members**, including representatives from Netflix, Prime Video, BBC, Sky, ITV, Spotify, The Walt Disney Company and Snap Inc. Building on the work of the Taskforce, OKRE commissioned cross-entertainment research exploring approaches to the social and cultural impact of entertainment. [The findings of the research can be found here.](#)



“Entertainment is a medium that can move, inspire and empower audiences, but its true social and cultural impact is often hard to quantify. That’s why Netflix was pleased to partner with OKRE on this initiative. Today’s report showcases the innovative approaches already being taken by the sector and identifies new opportunities to measure and share the real-world impact of what our audiences love to watch.”

- Benjamin King, Senior Director of Public Policy at Netflix on the OKRE research.



Additionally, OKRE supported the development of **ten entertainment projects** in the past year through the OKRE Fund, on top of providing production funding for two projects. All projects require cross-sector collaboration and seek to address misperceptions of communities and issues. One example of this is [MOTHERBOARD](#), a documentary feature shot over 20 years and recorded almost exclusively on iPhones. MOTHERBOARD explores the autobiographical story of the director, Victoria Mapplebeck, and the joy, pain and comedy of raising her now 20-year-old son alone. The documentary was accepted by the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, one of the world’s biggest documentary festivals, and it was shortlisted for the 2024 DOX: AWARD.

Key takeaways

- The various events held by the Fund, notably the collective learning events, have positively contributed to the advanced sharing of skills amongst the funded partners.
- Through sharing learning around the Fund, the Fund has an opportunity to influence both existing co-funders thinking and practice and prospective funders who may be interested in investing in arts, creativity and cultural/narrative change.
- Through sharing and facilitating opportunities for engagement and development, Counterpoints has simultaneously increased the representation of migrants and refugees in creative spaces.
- Through organising cross-sectoral events, commissioning research and supporting the development of entertainment projects, OKRE is increasing thought leadership and knowledge and creating impact within and across the pop culture for social change ecosystem.

ENABLERS OF THE FUND'S SUCCESS

This section explores the enabling factors that supported the Fund to achieve the outcomes outlined above.

1. Access to core funding

For **five out of the six funded partners**, the Power of Pop investment has been allocated to core costs, which has contributed to the strengthening of their organisational capacity, expertise and practices.

Core funding has provided the funded partners with the ability **to spend their grants in ways they see fit**, rather than being restricted to specific activities, prescribed outcomes or expected reach. Subsequently, this has enabled the funded partners to identify and devote their capacity to the areas that they feel would sustain the most impact.

Although no two funded partners utilised the investment in the same way, **the first cohort of funded partners predominantly experienced increases in organisational strengthening and capacity building** as a result of the funding. In comparison, **cohort two predominantly utilised the investment through project delivery**, however new hires were made across all funded partners.

Through access to core funding, the funded partners have been able to **reinvest in themselves**, which in turn enables them to reinvest in those they engage with and support. Some of the funded partners have chosen to spend their investment in more radical ways than others. For example, Skin Deep's organisational strengthening work has focused on establishing a **radical governance** structure and safeguarding policy. For others, the funding has been invested in less radical but equally important ways, such as paying staff appropriately. Through the investment, the Fund hopes to enable the funded partners to move away from a scarcity mindset and move into a position of abundance where sustainable change can happen.

The positive outcomes that have been achieved as a result of the funded partners accessing core funding has been enabled by the **pooled fund** approach. The benefit of funder collaboration, sharing risk and collective learning, has led to a transformative programme that is **the first of its kind in the UK**. As work continues, The Power of Pop Fund aims to harness the learnings of the Fund and bring together funders and interested parties to collectively develop opportunities to achieve long term cultural change.

2. The role of the Portfolio Manager

The Portfolio Manager has played a fundamental role in enabling the key outcomes that have been achieved in the first two years of the pilot, as well as driving the Fund forward. Since the Fund's inception, two individuals have been specialists with a third holding the post in the interim, and both specialists have brought lived experience leadership and a wealth of knowledge of the sector to the Fund.

2POCC shared a reflection on the comfort and understanding that comes from having a Portfolio Manager that is from the community, empathising with the work personally. This highlights the importance of having a diverse workforce with lived experience of the causes and communities that the Fund are supporting.

Across the two years, Comic Relief have worked to create spaces for open conversations that drive change. Upon hiring the current Portfolio Manager, the Fund underwent a period of intense reflection and evolution, which enabled the Implementation Team to pause and consider how the Fund could maximise its impact.

While the first Portfolio Manager was fundamental in getting the Fund set up, there are three main aspects of the second Portfolio Manager's approach that has enabled the Fund to be driven forward:

- 1. An openness to challenge**
- 2. A commitment to active listening and action**
- 3. A proactiveness in building connections and sharing resources with the Fund's Community and externally**

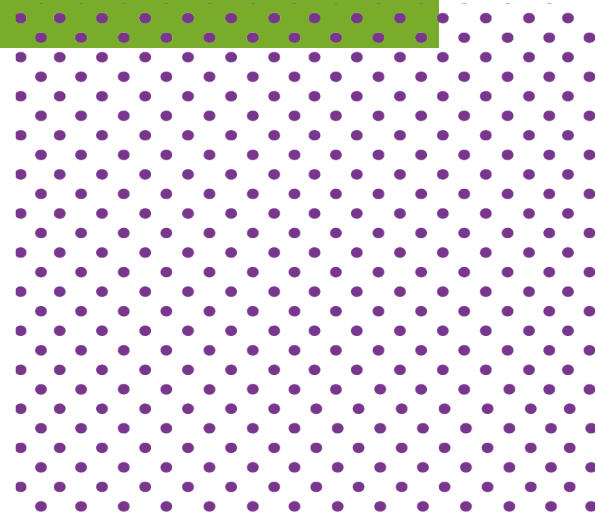
The second Portfolio Manager's openness to challenge and critical thought around the Fund's approach has positively shifted the direction of the Fund. It has created spaces for challenging conversations to be had whilst still respecting the boundaries of impact that had already been achieved. The Portfolio Manager has actively listened to the needs of both the funded partners and co-funders and responded with tangible actions. For example, the recruitment of the Community Council was enabled by the Portfolio Manager's proactive approach to understanding what the co-funders needed to advocate for reinvesting in this work. As the Community Council joined one and half years into the Fund, decisions had to be made quickly and subsequently trust and respect had to be built rapidly between Community Council members. This was "expertly managed" (Community Council member) by the Portfolio Manager who provided leadership and held space for difficult discussions. The Portfolio Manager has also driven the development of the 2025-2028 Strategy, Foundational Framework, funder plus support, the Power of Pop Mixer and the newsletter, alongside managing and distributing the grants and curating relationships with the Power of Pop Fund Community.

3. Collective learning events

The collective learning events have provided fertile ground for the Power of Pop Community to convene to share learnings and best practice. As the Fund has developed, the Learning Coordinator has taken a more adaptive approach to these events, disseminating feedback surveys for the past two collective learning events to ask the Fund's Community how these spaces can be improved in the future and to co-create the agenda for the next event. For example, following the February 2024 collective learning event, it was shared that as the Fund grows the Learning Coordinator needs to consider how to manage the number of people in attendance and the power dynamics of the space. As a result, the following event in June 2024 was scheduled so that different audiences attended different parts of the day, ensuring that the networking element was targeted and relevant. This feedback loop has enabled continual adaption and improvement to these spaces to maximise impact.

The collective learning events have also enabled the funded partners to achieve the key outcomes by:

1. Creating opportunities to share learnings from their work. This directly links to **outcome four**, which focuses on advancing the sharing of skills, expertise and learning within and across sectors.
2. Offering opportunities for funded partners to connect and learn more about each other's work. Network expansion is a key mechanism that over time could contribute to new collaborations and partnerships being built. This links to **outcome three** of this report, which focuses on increasing collaborations and partnerships.
3. Creating opportunities to build the funded partners' and expertise around MEL, which widens their organisational understanding of how to demonstrate their impact. This directly links to **outcome one**, which focuses on organisational strengthening.



Photographer: Derick Armah

CHALLENGES

Within the funded partners' six- and twelve-month reports, key challenges were identified that impacted service provision. In order of mention and significance, the below challenges have been identified:

1. **Lack of long-term sustainable funding**
2. **Staffing and engagement challenges**
3. **The capacity to collaborate with partners, networks and communities**
4. **Evaluating the impact of the Fund**
5. **Communicating and creating impact across the ecosystem**

Less common challenges, that were mentioned by two or fewer funded partners include:

1. **The pandemic/socio-politics**
2. **Relationship management and conflict resolution**
3. **Understanding how to appropriately price service offers**

1. Lack of long-term sustainable funding

The impact of core funding has been evidenced across the report. It provided time, capacity and resources for funded partners to meaningfully continue and advance both their internal processes and their projects and service offerings.

However, **four out of six funded partners** remain concerned about fundraising, highlighting that the small and short-term pots of funding that are more commonly available across the philanthropy sector do not provide the long-term stability that organisations working towards systemic change need. This sentiment was reinforced by attendees at the Creativity Does Good Dinner, who emphasised that community-led organisations need to survive long enough to make a difference. Without this, the sector's radical and essential work with communities of colour may be halted. The Creativity Does Good Dinner attendees reflected on the importance of building community power, having the opportunities to produce unencumbered creativity, and having the ability to access capital to achieve this.



“We have struggled to put in place a system for bidding and securing of new funds to financially support our operations moving into 2024/2025. We have prioritised budget this past year towards the running of our organisation, getting some key foundations in place [and] paying our team salaries”.

- Funded partner

Although there is acknowledgement that diversifying funding streams can help to sustain the funded partners' key areas of work, significant time, resource and capacity needs to be dedicated to this and often services and/or activities need to be refined to align with what sectors' need. It is clear that building a sustainable organisation is an ongoing challenge for many of the funded partners and further funding beyond the pilot is currently unguaranteed.

2. Staffing and engagement challenges at the co-funder and funded partner level

Since the Fund's inception, there has been staff turnover within the Implementation Team at Comic Relief, including changes in post for both the Portfolio Manager and the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Manager. The current Portfolio Manager started in July 2023, following a six-month gap where this position was temporarily filled by a non-specialist in the Comic Relief Funding team. This gap in expertise created a lack of consistency in the Fund's leadership, impacting relationships with the co-funders, funded partners and the Learning Coordinator. In addition, the current Portfolio Manager is only contracted until February 2025, which poses a significant challenge, particularly in light of the reinvestment from two of the co-funders. At such a crucial time in the pilot's timeline, the lack of a Portfolio Manager will undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the programme.



“Hiring new team members was a challenge for us - in the long term this will be really beneficial to us but the process of recruitment, on-boarding, management and training takes a huge amount of team capacity, which at times has been difficult to manage alongside other commitments and work”.

- Funded partner

Five out of six funded partners also highlighted that they are still facing staffing challenges despite many of the funded partners using their grants to cover core salary costs and/or recruit new staff.

The funded partners highlighted that the administrative burden of hiring new staff drew capacity away from their delivery. One funded partner stated that “administrative functions can occupy a lot of time and divert some of the delivery of the programme.”

3. The capacity to collaborate with networks, partners and communities

Across all funded partners, there is strong recognition about the benefits of networking and collaboration given it is this very process that supports the strengthening of the sector. However, whilst the Power of Pop Fund has created immeasurable opportunities for networking, the ability to sustain and advance these opportunities has been challenging for some funded partners. **Two out of the six** funded partners stated that due to high demand, from their service users, the ability to focus on collaboration with peer organisations has been challenging. This has subsequently impacted their ability to grow new partnerships and increase the reach of their work.



“The biggest challenge across this work is the lack of capacity for partner organisations, artists and communities. Incredible work is done with very little but because the demand is so great, especially with the asylum system being so dysfunctional and underfunded, organisations and individuals sometimes find it hard to find time to engage with new projects”.

- Funded partner

Additionally, as funded partners advance in their work, they are recognising the importance of intentional collaboration that strikes a balance between offering structure and informality.



“[We are busy] delivering our Taskforce which was made up of senior leaders across the entertainment industry - however bringing [them] together was a challenge and there was a recognition to ensure there is clear direction and purpose for [the networking] and for its goals to be realised.”

- Funded partner

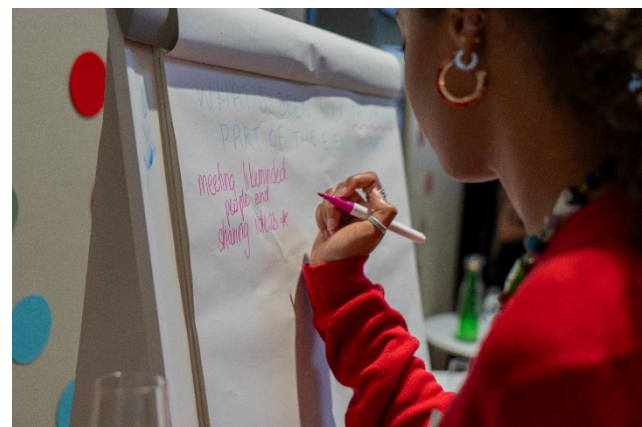
4. Evaluating the impact of the Fund

Since its development, the evaluation of the Fund has evolved significantly to reflect changes in thinking and approach (see page 11).

As part of the evaluation of the Fund, the Learning Coordinator has reviewed the funded partners' six- and twelve-month reports to analyse key outcomes, challenges and learning. On reflection, while the reporting approach has provided the evaluation with substantial qualitative insight, there has been a lack of quantitative data to evidence the impact of the Fund thus far. The need for a more robust MEL approach was highlighted by the Community Council and although progress has been made to address this, through the implementation of Outcomes Harvesting and the revision of the learning questions in the strategy, these developments two years into the pilot create a number of challenges for the evaluation.

After implementing the learning from collective learning events to rephrase the learning questions, there was an opportunity to sense check these questions with our existing funded partners. While this process was participatory in one sense - drawing on the lived expertise of the Community Council - it could have been more so by engaging funded partners for a late-stage review. A further challenge is the extent to which the funded partners will be able to rigorously measure and provide evidence against the revised learning questions by the end of the pilot, particularly if MEL expertise is not held within the organisation. Although the Implementation Team is interested in adapting the funded partners' six month and annual reporting to capture insight in light of revised learning questions, it will be challenging to do so without placing additional burden on the funded partners. The MEL support offer will be key to building the funded partners' confidence and expertise around measuring and reporting impact.

Furthermore, when discussing the extent to which the Power of Pop Fund can influence change within the wider sector, the funded partners emphasised that it takes a lot of time and resources to change infrastructure and the impact of this work may not be visible by the end of the pilot. This raises a wider point around evaluating social change work: the seeds planted by organisations working in this field may not grow and blossom for years or even generations to come. However, there are impact indicators that the funded partners can be supported to measure and evaluate. More can be found on these in the [Power of Pop Fund MEL Toolkit](#).



Photographer: Derick Armah

5. Communicating and creating impact across the ecosystem

Five out of the six funded partners described the difficulty in creating wider impact across the ecosystem and/or communicating their work across to key stakeholders. One funded partner reflected on this challenge below (right):

Similarly, another funded partner acknowledges the varying demands from their key stakeholders, identifying the challenge of understanding “what the industry needs compared to what we can offer”. Given the constant external influences within the sector, such as socio-politics and the changing nature of funding sources, stakeholder demands are ever-changing. Another funded partner recognised this (left):



“[We] identified that one of the missing pieces in the narrative change sector is how to apply treatments in a coherent way for long-term transformation. The various stakeholders ought to collaborate on this work [but this is challenging].”

- Funded partner



“[We are experiencing a] challenge in terms of advancing our work across the wider ecosystem. There are different needs, and various stakeholders who have different agendas which impacts how and where [our work] can be shared.”

- Funded partner



Photographer: Derick Armah

LEARNINGS AND ADAPTIONS

The following section outlines what has emerged as key learning throughout the first two years of the pilot and how the Fund's approach has adapted in response.

1. Bringing lived and learnt experiences to the Fund

Prior to the Community Council's involvement, the Power of Pop Fund lacked governance and support around strategic decision-making from people who reflect the communities the Fund aims to support. The recruitment of the Community Council has illustrated the importance of rooting the Fund's decision-making in lived and learnt experience. Given the Council's diverse expertise, the strategic direction it has offered has ensured that the Fund is 'led by and for' marginalised communities, which is even more important when, historically, powerbrokers within the funding and creative sectors have often not been representative of the communities they are supporting or depicting. Embedding lived and learnt experience has been instrumental for a Fund that is looking to implement new and innovative ways of grant making.

A key challenge experienced by the Community Council during the strategy development process and awarding cohort three was the lack of time to connect with the existing funded partners and understand their work in practice. Due to the short timeline in which decisions needed to be made, the Council was not introduced to the funded partners until the June 2024 collective learning event. Nonetheless, the process of awarding the third cohort demonstrated the strength of lived experience decision-making, as the Community Council were able to share their expertise and knowledge of the sectors in which the prospective organisations work.

Going forward, it is crucial that decision-making continues to be led by the communities which the Fund seeks to serve and more needs to be done to identify and address any gaps in the Fund's awareness of who is driving this work.



"This process [the development of the strategy] highlighted the importance of being lived experience-led, [as] we were able to make decisions that were immediately actionable for the funded partners and also realistic about what can be accomplished by the end of the pilot."

- Community Council member



Photographer: Derick Armah

2. Lessons from trialling a new way of grant-making

The Power of Pop Fund has adopted various unique approaches to the grant-making process as a means to pilot new and innovative mechanisms for achieving social change, such as the onboarding of the Community Council and organising the Mixer event, which was essentially an expression of interest event for prospective funded partners.

Through the Mixer (page 32), the Power of Pop Fund has experimented with a new method to grant-making. However:

- There was **limited time and resources** to organise the event.
- Those that were invited to the Mixer were largely from the Portfolio Manager and Strategic Consultant's networks, therefore individuals and organisations that are **not currently known** to the Implementation Team may have been **unaware of this opportunity**.
- The fact that the event was **held in London** may also have limited organisations outside of the capital from being able to attend.
- The Strategy (including the eligibility criteria) was completed **after the Mixer event**.

However, with a lack of other radical grant-making models to refer to, the Fund had limited guidance on how to conduct and communicate the decision-making process and there is much that can be learnt from its shortcomings:

- The process of **identifying prospective organisations** for future funding needs to expand beyond the networks of the Implementation Team and organisations that have a strong online presence.
- There is a clear need for **greater transparency** around how the Fund's grant-making decisions are made and further thinking needs to go into how this is communicated to the sector.
- Future events aimed at building infrastructure and supporting the wider ecosystem need to have a **clear purpose and follow up strategy**.
- Convening and collaborating with multiple stakeholders requires considerable resources and time and there is a need **for greater clarity around who holds these spaces**.
- The **Community Council** plays a critical role in upholding this across the Fund. By **reframing challenges as learning opportunities**, the Fund is able to adapt iteratively to ensure there is clarity around the grant making process in the future.

3. Learnings around networking and collaborations

Over the first two years of the Fund, the format of the collective learning events has changed significantly and it is clear that more participatory and creative activities during these spaces enables deeper engagement and learning. The Learning Coordinator has experimented with more creative evaluation activities, such as body mapping, charades, four corners, drawing and sketching activities and more, which has enabled the Learning Coordinator to strike a balance between collating insights for the evaluation and ensuring the spaces are mutually beneficial for the Power of Pop Fund Community.

The **Creativity Does Good Dinner** was a positive showcase of the scope and impact of network collaborations. The Fund was intentional in its role: convening likeminded individuals and enabling them to, informally, share their experience and expertise. Overall, the dinner was successful in connecting the funded partners to industry leaders and sparking insightful conversations, and there is a clear appetite to continue these types of events.

However, beyond this, the dinner is yet to demonstrate what impact these new connections will have on the funded partners' work and the Fund more broadly. This could be due to:

- 1. The limited capacity of attendees to foster new partnerships and collaborations.**
- 2. As many of the relationships are at their infancy stage it may be too premature to tell what the impact of this dinner will be.**
- 3. Funded partners not reporting to the Implementation Team if they have continued these conversations. Given the intention to grow these partnerships organically, it may take longer to build relationships and rapport.**

Overall, further feedback on the dinner needs to be collated from attendees to understand what barriers they face to continuing these connections and conversations. In addition, the dinner was the first example of a new funder plus offering so to see the wider benefit of this, more activities around networking and collaborations need to be held.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YEAR 3 AND BEYOND

This section will outline the key recommendations for both the programme and the funded partners for the final year of the pilot and beyond.

Recommendations for the programme

1. Ensure staffing is in place to manage the Fund beyond February 2025

The Portfolio Manager has been critical in driving the strategic development of the Fund, building relationships with the Power of Pop Fund Community and providing opportunities for the funded partners that go above and beyond grant-making. At such a crucial time in the pilot's timeline the lack of a Portfolio Manager would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact across the programme. Maintaining this role will be key to ensuring the Fund's impact is maximised and communicated effectively and relationships are maintained with co-funders who are reinvesting.

2. Establish clarity around the future direction of the Fund

As the pilot approaches its final year of the pilot phase, the Fund is keen to explore how it can respond to multiple, intersectional forms of inequality and disadvantage, such as climate justice and gender justice. A key question to consider in this process is the extent to which the Power of Pop Fund needs to adapt to morphing funding sector's priorities to secure further investment. Although the Implementation Team and co-funders have not reached an answer to this yet, it is clear that the Power of Pop Fund does not want to act as a gatekeeper of potential investment for the communities it serves. Further involvement of the funded partners needs to be done to strike a balance between maintaining integrity and sustaining investment in this field.

3. Identify and address gaps in infrastructure to support the wider ecosystem

There is a definite need to continue interrogating what the needs are of the communities the Fund aims to support and how the Fund can facilitate infrastructure development. A key part of this is the need to help organisations working in the pop culture for social change field situate their work within the wider ecosystem and to build a community of practice. Going forward, the Power of Pop Fund will need to increase its efforts to identify gaps in the infrastructure that supports the pop culture for social change ecosystem, which could be addressed through commissioning research or by the Fund playing a larger role in curating events aimed at building infrastructure.



“I think looking closely at the ecology and the skills and practices within the infrastructure to support this work - where do we still have gaps? I think we will need to consider whether the point of leverage for the work is right going forward - which for me is about our role as funders alongside the wider field, where is our investment most helpful? We might decide we want to concentrate on one or two aspects of the field to bolster practice, so I'm thoughtful about what data we might need to help do this.”

- Co-funder

4. Continue to practise patience in this work

One of the challenges the Power of Pop Fund faces is the fact that cultural change can take a long time and, more often than not, it requires a kaleidoscopic cultural response. This means both existing co-funders and prospective funders need to be mindful of how much expectation and responsibility is placed on the funded partners and on the Fund itself.

The Power of Pop Fund strategy and Foundational Framework will play a key role in setting clear expectations of this process. The Fund should ensure it communicates clearly the direct impact it can have, and what is beyond the Fund's remit.

Recommendations for the funded partners

1. Test and utilise the Foundational Framework to situate wider impact and influence

Within the programme, there is broad opportunity for impact to be understood and legitimised through a social justice lens. This directly relates to the impact of the funded partners who are working within the pop culture space, which has historically lacked robust evidence of change. However, the Foundational Framework outlines how the arts, creativity and narrative/cultural change sectors can reshape the world through a practical reframing of impact.

This reframing is key, as it can be applied to the direct issues this Fund aims to tackle as well as broader social issues. It can also support creating a case for change within the wider sector through establishing key reasons behind funding activities and programmes that sit within the pop culture for social justice sector. For the Framework to continue to evolve, the funded partners need to lead on testing the Framework in practice and sharing back learning with the Fund.

2. *Articulate impact through a systems change lens*

Communicating impact is key to evidencing the potential of pop culture for social change work in the UK and securing future investment. The development of the strategy and revised learning questions for the Fund provides an opportunity for the funded partners to communicate impact through a systems change lens, looking in particular at how they are defining and communicating their purpose, sharing and shifting power, equitably redistributing resources and building new and collaborative relationships. Whilst the Foundational Framework provides scope to legitimise pop culture impact, specific framing and language can be used by the funded partners to indicate how their work creates wider systemic change.

3. *Bring to life the revised learning questions*

Over the past year, the Power of Pop Fund established new learning questions that create a helpful foundation to measure progress towards the Fund's goals. Funded partners can contribute to this by beginning to collect and share qualitative and quantitative evidence within their reporting and evaluation and learning opportunities. Additionally, the role of the Learning Coordinator will be to curate a MEL framework that effectively captures the specific contribution of the programme within the sector but more directly the funded partners' contributions to wider movements.

This is ultimately a two-pronged approach that requires direct outputs from the Implementation team and funded partners.



Photographer: Derick Armah

CONCLUSION

Driven by the need to support creatives of colour and marginalised communities, the Power of Pop Fund has sought to advance social justice by championing transformative, community-led organisations that influence pop culture creatively. Across the Fund, the following outcomes have been achieved and evidenced in the first two years:

- **Increased organisational capacity and expertise**
- **Increased engagement and participation of people of colour and marginalised communities in creative projects across the Fund**
- **Increased collaborations and partnerships**
- **Advanced sharing of skills, expertise and learning within and across sectors**

The Fund has been instrumental in bringing together the funded partners through networking and collaboration opportunities. Connections that are being made between organisations and across sectors are helping to **disrupt existing power structures**. Through grant-making, cultivating community leaders, strengthening organisations and networking the programme is growing the pop culture for social change ecosystem in the UK.

Additionally, the Fund's understanding of its vision for the wider world, mission and goals, has evolved in parallel with the funded partners' ambitions. Previous assumptions indicated the focus of the Fund was around representation through increasing access to industries, however this is now more nuanced and deeper.

Ultimately, there is not one model of creating change and achieving social justice. Funded partners across the programme are testing new approaches and ways of working. Despite the variety of methods the funded partners use, there is significant **overlap and alignment** between the organisations' visions, however each funded partner is building towards their vision in different ways. This resonates with a key goal of the Power of Pop Fund **to support organisations to develop in the ways they wish and build collective voice and momentum to affect systemic change**. The Fund intends to seed ideas, strengthen and refine them so they can be tested and developed at scale.

An enabler to the success of the programme includes the development of the Foundational Framework which has been instrumental in establishing common definitions for the terms (e.g. 'pop culture' vs 'popular culture' vs 'mainstream culture' etc.) It has enabled the Power of Pop Fund Community to build a core understanding of the ecosystem and uncover how the funded partners work aligns - which will help prospective funders see where and how they can align their funding. However, the work is not finished, and excitement builds to see how the Power of Pop Fund continues to build movements and affect wider systemic change.

Reflections for the Field

1. The need for long-term core funding is pressing for organisations working at the intersections of arts, creativity and narrative/cultural change. Further investment is needed to sustain this field and this does not need to be restricted to just the charitable sector. How can corporate donors and high net worth individuals be brought on board to understand the potential of this work in the UK?
2. Now more than ever, amidst negative political narrative, misinformation and harmful assumptions around systemically marginalised communities, it is important that the field continues to champion the voices of organisations working across racial and migrant justice.
3. How can the learnings from this pilot be disseminated more widely? What role can funders play in sharing the key learnings across this Fund? How can Comic Relief create opportunities for further thought leadership?

POWER OF POP FUND

