

POWER OF POP FUND

Strategy 2025-2028



SPECIAL THANKS

The drafting of this document was a collaborative effort, with insights from a great number of people. In particular we would like to recognise the following contributors, whose work inspired us, whose insights guided us, and whose challenges made our programme stronger.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS	6
GOVERNANCE	7
PROGRAMME OUTLINE	9
INCOME GENERATION	11
CONCLUSION	11
LEARNING QUESTIONS AND SOURCES	12

INTRODUCTION



A people's art is the genesis of their freedom.

Claudia Jones

Background

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. The Pop Culture Collaborative champions storytelling and narrative shift to conduct transformative work for racialised communities and migrants. 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 justice². Inspired by the findings, Alice Sachrajda and Unbound Philanthropy set out to manifest this vision into a reality. Bringing on board four additional funder partners, the Power of Pop Fund was born.



The Power of Pop Fund is a pooled fund bringing together co-funders who are interested in learning, taking bold funding approaches, and bolstering the pop culture for social justice field in the UK. Transforming societal narratives around justice is a radical and ambitious endeavour. No organisation, company or community can achieve this single handedly. A transformed society will require experimentation and collaboration.

It is going to require hopeful and convincing messaging that brings the public along with us. Adopting a pooled fund structure demonstrates collaboration as practice and allows for extensive shared learning and abundant thought leadership across multiple sectors and partners.

We understand a pooled fund as a dynamic “where multiple funders contribute money and delegate grant-making authority into a separate entity to advance a particular objective or strategy.”³ Working as a pooled fund has offered the Power of Pop Fund a number of benefits. We have been able to commit to bold decision making and shared learning through this collaboration, that may have been difficult to manage otherwise. So far, the Power of Pop Fund has been hosted by co-funder Comic Relief, which has allowed us to maximise the infrastructure of an existing funder and tap into networks for collaboration. A pooled fund approach has produced positive outcomes for the Power of Pop Fund. The benefit of funder collaboration, sharing risk, collectively engaging learning and a higher risk appetite, has led to a transformative programme that is the first of its kind in the UK.

- 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.](#)
- 3 [Alice Sachrajda and Lena Baumgartner \(2024\). Shifting Power: Exploring the Value of Pooled Funds in the UK Funding Landscape.](#)

Theoretical Basis

In order to maximise pop culture as a catalyst for justice, it is important we establish a shared understanding of what we mean by pop culture. For our purposes, we are adopting the following definition:

Pop culture is a collection of creative ideas, and people's interaction with these ideas, which creates emergent, commonly shared reference points at a large scale.⁴

Power of Pop Fund

We understand creative outputs in the broadest sense, including concepts, ideas, fashion, films, broadcast TV, streaming, music, gaming, articles, books, social media and more. It is these creative outputs that pop culture is usually grounded in. The elements of pop culture that we are particularly interested in are those that are fundamentally creative, 'having original ideas that have value'⁵. We understand that pop culture is emergent, expansive and has an important role to play in visioning and imagining the future. An understanding of trends can help us to maximise its strategic use for the overall betterment of our society.

While there are many methods to advance justice, from service support to advocacy, culture is invaluable because it is a tool for the creation of "a public", that includes our collective values, ways of knowing, and shared beliefs. Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation captures this.

A "public" doesn't exist until you create it, it is produced through what people read/watch/do.⁶

Tyler, I. and Campbell, S.

We embrace the reality that when funding justice, a range of important cause areas are fundamentally interwoven. We use racial and migrant justice as a key lens to advance the inextricably linked pursuits of gender justice, climate justice, environmental justice, democracy, equity and inclusion. We are keen to further excavate the inter-relation between these various avenues for justice in the delivery of the Power of Pop programme.

Accepting that cultural curation is intentional and significant, we understand how critical it is that marginalised communities are feeding into cultural production. In developing this strategy, we have reflected on a number of theoretical and practical frameworks that ground our work, including narrative and cultural shift, behavioural change, and movement building.

Within this document, we reflect on the strengths established through our pilot phase and set out a robust and achievable programme that can contribute meaningfully to advancing the pop culture for social justice field in the United Kingdom.



4 [Power of Pop Fund \(2024\). Pop Culture for Social Justice: A Foundational Framework.](#)

5 [Sir Ken Robinson \(2007\). Do schools kill creativity?](#)

6 [Tyler, I. and Campbell, S. \(2024\) Poverty stigma: a glue that holds poverty in place. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.](#)

VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS

Vision

We envision a society where thought provoking creativity inspires the public to believe in and demand equitable futures. We encourage ambitious and radical approaches to racial and migrant justice grounded in the values of love, care and shared humanity.

Mission

Our mission is to advance social justice by championing transformative, community-led organisations that influence pop culture creatively. We provide funding and organisational support to improve their reach, sustainability and impact.

Goals

1. Cultivate Community Leadership

We fund 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, we hope to leave positive imprints and lasting legacies.

2. Strengthen Organisations

We fund organisations who have identified their unique contribution to social justice and champion their autonomy, integrity, and authenticity. We offer 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 we work with funded partners to identify what ideal operations would look like for them.

3. Build Infrastructure

We work 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, we encourage connections beyond borders, bringing our funded partners into relationship with diverse collaborators.

Creativity can cross borders freely in ways that bodies can't.

K Biswas

Guiding Principles

● Bold Experimentation

We acknowledge that bold experimentation is inherent in creativity and is fundamental to realising new futures. We accept that risk is necessary to test alternative approaches strategies, and emergent projects for cultural change work.

● Lived-Experience Led

We centre racialised and migrant communities at the heart of our work through our funding choices and decision-making approaches. We consider lived experience as a key qualification in contributing to this endeavour.

● Adaptability

We are open and willing to make brave adaptations where our learning objectives or assumptions need to shift. We understand that cultural change work often involves responding meaningfully to societal spark moments.



- **Patient Collaboration**

We trust our co-funders and funded partners as we collectively work towards a shared goal. When contributing to systems change work, it is necessary to be patient regarding learning and outcomes.

- **Collective Learning**

We actively foster a spirit of collective learning to elevate the overall expertise of the field. Through the exchange of methods, approaches and outputs, together we can build a new shared cultural canon.

- **Radical Love**

The word philanthropy translates to the love of humanity. That love of humanity, community and planet grounds our fund. We support organisations who speak from a place of radical love and maintain that our Fund should replicate this radical love of humanity not just in **what** we do but **how** we do it. We embody intersectional feminist principles of radical love and care within our approach.

It is only emotion and empathy – most powerfully evoked by storytelling – that can change a person’s mind. And storytelling is the centre of our humanity.⁷

Ellen E Jones

GOVERNANCE

Day to Day Implementation

As a pooled fund, the Power of Pop Fund has a unique array of stakeholders, whose views, insights and steers are relevant for decision making. Day to day decision making sits with the fund manager, who is based with our implementing funder partner, Comic Relief. The fund manager is responsible for making and managing grants, project planning the programme, crafting activities, and implementing learning. The Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Manager supports with designing the learning approach and outputs. These learning methods, events, activities and pieces are carried out by the Learning Coordinator.

Strategic Decision Making and Input

At a strategic level, decisions are directed by the lived experience advisory board, our Community Council. In addition to this, we welcome guidance from our co-funders and our strategic consultant.

Community Council

The Community Council is our lived experience advisory board, constituted of members with extensive experience in the creative, social justice, entertainment and third sectors. The Community Council meets monthly to contribute to strategic reflections and decision making around the Power of Pop Fund. The Community Council operates in an advisory capacity, steering the Power of Pop Fund. The fund manager is also a member of the Community Council in order to promote transparency and integration between programme governance and delivery. The ‘community’, here, refers to creatives, cultural change-makers, racialised people, those with lived experience of the migration system, and those who are influencing popular culture. The Community Council will share sector-knowledge, support long-term planning and shape selection criteria for funding calls.

7 Ellen E Jones (2024). Screen Deep: How film and TV can solve racism and save the world.



The Community Council members are responsible for the shaping of the programme and advising on strategic decisions about the evolution of the Fund. Decisions made by the Community Council are operationalised by the fund manager, and in house team at Comic Relief. This dynamic allows for the authoritative contribution of the Community Council while also ensuring risk is managed by the implementing organisation rather than individual Community Council members. Decisions made by the Community Council are subject to implementation by Comic Relief. However, in the principle of shifting power, the implementing funder endeavours to operationalise the decisions made by the Community Council.



A radical shift can put communities at the center of the grantmaking equation, with accountability flowing from funders towards grantees and ultimately to communities...⁸

Coe and Schlangen



Co-Funder Input

We are proud to be supported by a group of founding co-funders (Comic Relief, Unbound Philanthropy, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn and Oak Foundation) who share learning from their funding programmes, as well as advice and recommendations about the direction of the Power of Pop Fund. The dynamic of our funder pool is collaborative, encouraging, and grounded in our value of collective learning. The Power of Pop Fund naturally has significant synergies with the strategies of our co-funders. In particular, our co-funders are brought together by a shared interest in pop culture, cultural shift, racial justice, migrant justice, gender justice, climate and equity. While our co-funders do not offer binding instruction for the Fund, they join us in our journey of learning by attending our twice annual Collective Learning Events.

Strategic Consultant

The Power of Pop Fund is supported by a Strategic Consultant, who has been in relationship with the programme from the outset, and is the author of foundational research, which shaped the early direction of the Fund. Our Strategic Consultant supports with strategic input and fundraising efforts.

Funded Partners

Our funded partners are valued collaborators, who offer extensive input in the shaping and the delivery of the programme through reports and Collective Learning Events as part of our funding relationship. Additionally, funded partners are offered voluntary opportunities for participation in additional learning outputs, events and strategic development. Our relational approach facilitates a fluid communication of ideas and recommendations.

The combination of our implementation team, funded partners, co-funders, Community Council and Strategic Consultant culminates in robust day to day and strategic decision making for the Power of Pop Fund.

8 [Coe and Schlangen \(2022\). Pulling up the floorboards: Reshaping accountability and evaluation in an era of core costs grantmaking.](#)

PROGRAMME OUTLINE

In order to achieve the outlined goals, our funding will be directed in two main ways. The majority of our funding will constitute organisational grants, for funded partners who are selected against our eligibility criteria and meet a high threshold against our preferred criteria. Secondly, we will be allocating funding towards activities that build infrastructure such as: events, research and networking spaces that aid knowledge sharing.

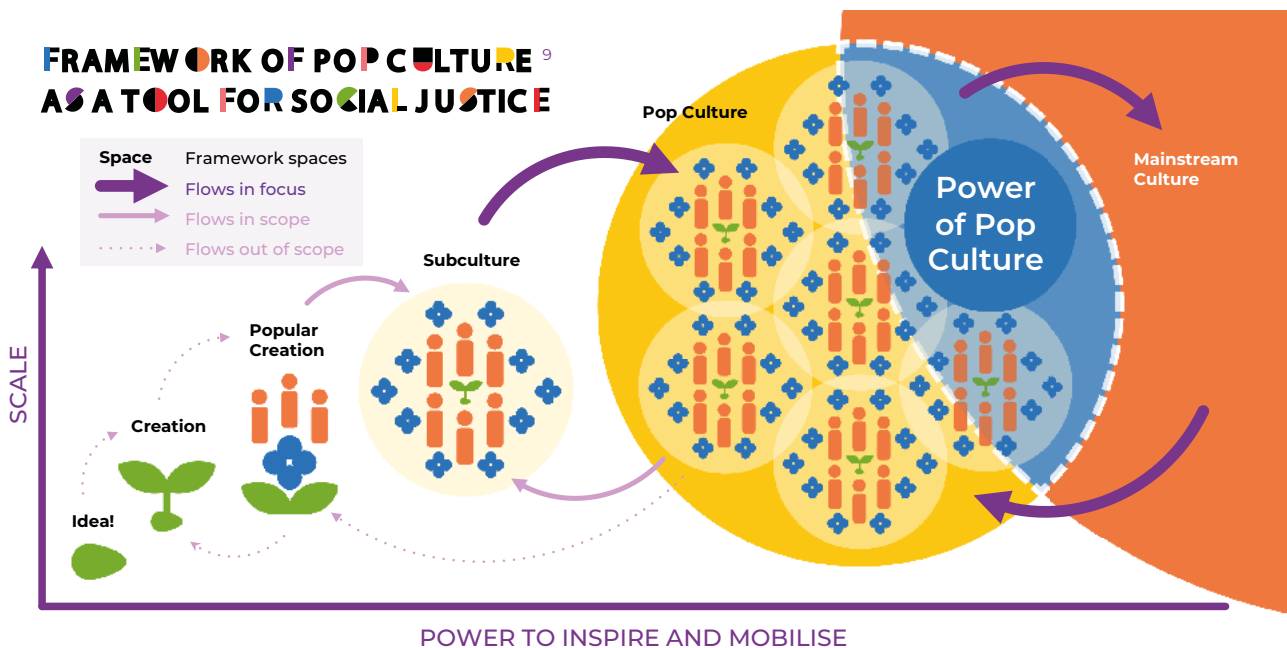
We understand that funding interventions can be useful for supporting individual creatives, organisations or developing programmes within creative industries. The Power of Pop funding is primarily focused on supporting activities and programmes that are part of the subculture to reach broader audiences, leading to cultural and narrative shift. To this end our grants take the following structure.

Organisational Grants

Funding Programme

Our programme aspires to build relationships with funded partners that support them to amplify and grow their existing activity. Our intention is for funded partners to have the opportunity to develop their leadership, strengthen their organisations and expand their audiences while in funding. Multi-year funding, between 3-5 years, best allows for this support. We are keen to situate our funding relationships at the upper end of this duration. We understand the importance of considerate and equitable exit strategy and believe clear durations of funding would aid this.

By offering intentional funder plus support, we hope that our funding will support organisations to refine and scale their work. In the longer term, we predict that our funded partners will refine revenue producing programmes and attract further charitable funding leading to greater sustainability.



9 The Power of Pop Fund's Foundational Framework was created in Spring 2024 to better understand how strategic funding interventions could advance pop culture as a tool used for social justice.

Eligibility Criteria

In order to be eligible for funding for the Power of Pop Fund, prospective funded partners need to satisfy four core requirements. We ask those interested in funding to reflect on whether their organisational structure, decision making, approaches and intentions are aligned with the following criteria. At this stage we will be predominantly funding charitable organisations and community interest companies. However, we understand that individuals, companies and partnerships can also do fantastic work and wish to explore funding different types of organisations in the future.

1. Lived-Experience Led

We support organisations that are led by people with experience of racialisation and migration. We understand meaningful representation as leadership at the director level, chair of the board level, or a high percentage of representation across the executive level.

2. Cultural Contribution

We specifically fund organisations using cultural and creative methods to advance social justice. Cultural outputs should contribute to wider shifting narratives, evolving industry processes and budding new cultural scenes.

3. Broader social impact

We fund organisations who understand the contribution they make to racial and migrant justice. We seek organisations who have demonstrated some social impact through their activities and programmes.

4. Capacity for growth and scaling

Pop culture is characterised by scale. We seek organisations who have a mission and methods that can be scaled to reach wider audiences, build further alliances and make greater impact.

Selection Preferences

Beyond our core eligibility criteria, we are prioritising organisations who satisfy the following preferences.

5. Community Work

We seek organisations whose activities and programmes are rooted in the communities they serve. Your work leaves positive imprints and inspires others within your community.

6. Regions of the UK

We seek to support work happening across the UK. We understand that charitable funding— especially racial justice funding - is disproportionately targeted to London and we endeavour to rebalance this in our funding going forwards.¹⁰

Ecosystem Supporting Activities

While directly funding organisations goes a long way to satisfying our initial goals of cultivating leadership and strengthening organisations, our pilot programme has demonstrated the radical potential of creating spaces for networking, shared ideation and collaboration. As such, building infrastructure for the field will require the funding of activities that benefit those outside of our cohort of funded partners. In addition to our organisational grants, we will fund targeted research, events and activities to support the wider pop culture for social justice ecosystem.



INCOME GENERATION

Thus far, the Power of Pop Fund has been funded by philanthropic trusts and foundations. Our location in the funding sector has enabled us to evolve the programme over the course of the pilot and facilitate a spirit of collective learning. We intend to continue these relationships and welcome further trusts and foundations into our pool.

Additionally, as the programme matures out of the pilot phase, it is necessary to diversify our co-funder pool to welcome input and contribution from other relevant sectors. In particular, we endeavour to welcome entertainment companies, corporate social responsibility departments and other corporate entities to join our funding pool. Additionally, with our focus on community, it will be necessary to reflect on how fundraising efforts can engage the public directly.

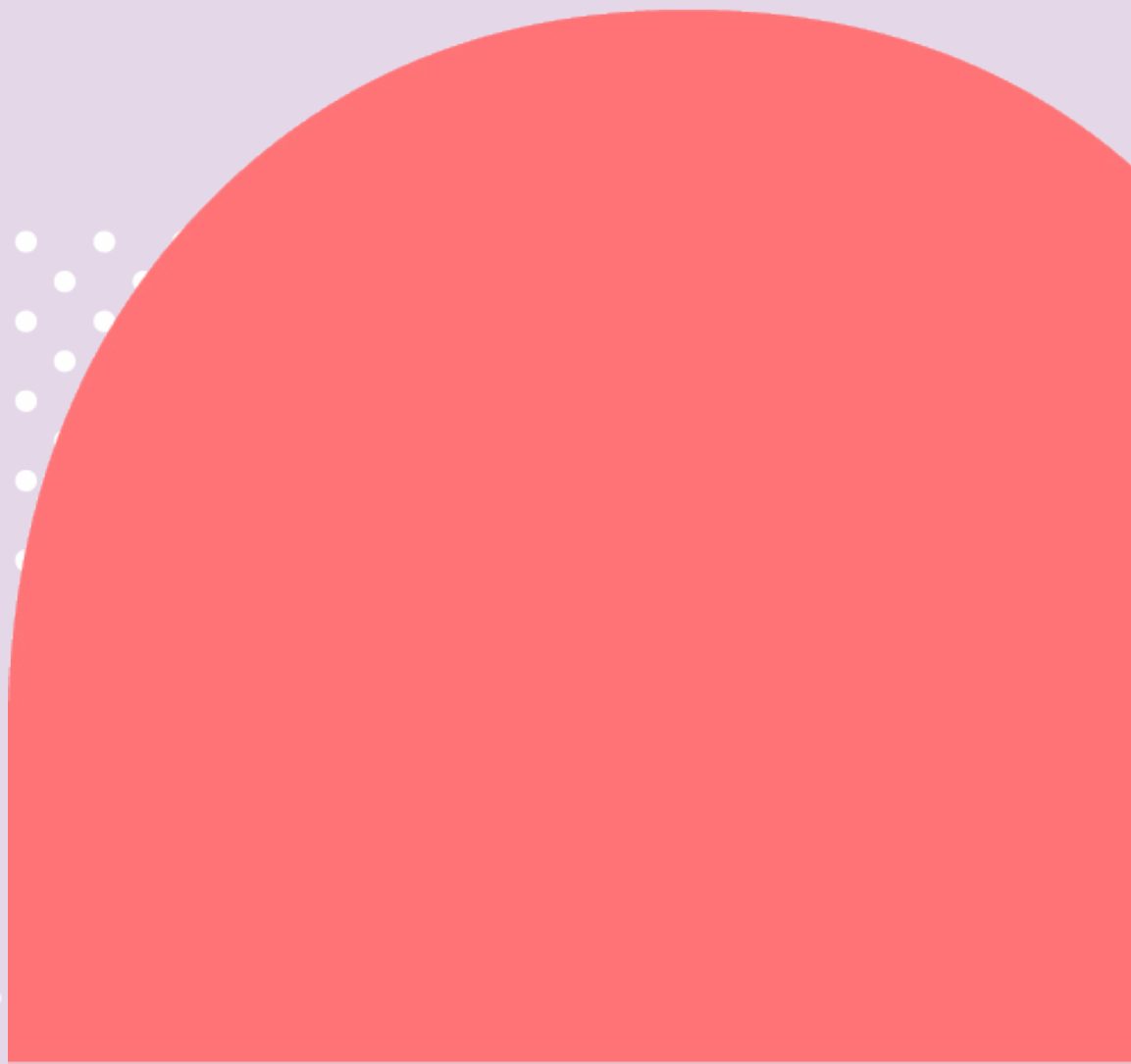
We also welcome involvement from individual high net worth donors, especially those with experience in the creative industries.

CONCLUSION

The Power of Pop Fund has achieved a considerable amount during its pilot phase, and the ongoing potential is evident. With an ambitious vision, we understand ourselves as actors in a wider movement. As funders, we must be nimble and responsive to support the needs of the ecosystem. By implementing our learnings from the first two years, we are confident that this funding strategy will enable the Power of Pop Fund to cultivate leadership, strengthen organisations and build infrastructure in the pop culture for social justice field.



**LEARNING
QUESTIONS
AND SOURCES**



Goal 1: Cultivate Community Leadership

We fund 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, we hope to leave positive imprints and lasting legacies.

Learning Question 1

How is the Power of Pop Fund supporting visionaries and community leaders to manifest their visions and operationalise their interventions?

What sources will we use?

We will ask funded partners to track participation in leadership development opportunities of staff members as part of six-month reports. This will include both number completed and brief reflections. Potential leadership development activities could include residential/non-residential leadership programmes, coaching/mentoring, opportunities to share expertise with industry partners, peer to peer learning opportunities and other talent pipelines.

What topics are we keen to explore?

What funder plus support did the leaders of funded partner organisations access? How useful were these sessions?

- Sessions attended
- Events
- Trainings

Learning Question 2

To what extent have community leaders developed their skills, confidence, power, and approaches to social justice?

What sources will we use?

We will facilitate a discussion at the final collective learning event, host interviews with learning coordinator, and collect learning during monitoring reports. We will use journey mapping to observe highs and lows, inputs and outputs.

What topics are we keen to explore?

We are interested in learning how the leaders of funded partner organisations feel about the work they are doing now in comparison. This could be both tangible and intangible.

Intangible leadership elements could include:

- Confidence
- Sense of community
- Increased skills

Tangible leadership elements could include:

- New methods/approaches have been tested and applied within organisations
- Refining of skills – such as proposals, outreach, business planning

What positions do funded partner leaders currently hold, how they value their time/expertise, what projects outside of their organisation they have worked on (and with who), and how they feel their expertise/network has grown as a result of these opportunities?

Goal 2: Strengthen Organisations

We fund organisations who have identified their unique contribution to social justice and champion their autonomy, integrity, and authenticity. We offer wrap around support to facilitate healthy organisational life spans, in the belief that sustained interventions are essential for systemic change.

Learning Question 3

To what extent have the funded partner organisations been strengthened since joining the Power of Pop Fund?

What sources will we use?

We will conduct a feedback survey or polls following direct access to funder plus support and other external support.

We will use the Onion Tool as an exercise during our collective learning events.

What topics are we keen to explore?

How effective has funder plus support been in increasing the funded partners' expertise and strengthening their organisational sustainability? This includes MEL support, guidance around business development, whether our funded partners have diversified their income, and whether they feel they have maintained organisational autonomy and integrity.

How effective has 'external' support (outside of the Power of Pop Fund) been in increasing the funded partner's expertise and strengthening their organisational sustainability?

Learning Question 4

To what extent have our funded partners been able to do their work in the way they want to?

What sources will we use?

We will ask reflection questions in 1-1 learning interviews around the funded partner relationship with compromise in the delivery of their activities.

What topics are we keen to explore?

To what extent have our funded partner organisations been able to operate unapologetically in the delivery of your activities? How have funded partner organisations engaged with compromise?

Learning Question 5

To what extent have our funded partners considered definitions of success, desired contributions to society and healthy life span?

What sources will we use?

Reference to reflections of healthy life spans in the context of governance development.

What topics are we keen to explore?

In the spirit of regeneration, we understand that the existing infinitely is not the only indication of success. In seeking to exist in perpetuity, the charity sector has caused systemic harm. To this end, we support our funded partners to think in terms of the contributions that they consider success.

Are themes of success, deceleration, mergers, contribution and attribution being discussed at Board level for example?

Goal 3: Build Infrastructure

We work 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, we encourage connections beyond borders, bringing our funded partners into relationship with diverse collaborators.

Learning Question 6

How have the funded partners collaborated or built relationships with other actors interested in pop culture as a tool for social justice?

What sources will we use?

We will ask funded partners to continue sharing evidence of events and collaborations. Examples could include:

- Photo Voice - ask funded partners to take photos of their collaborations/ partnerships with the sector. Discuss the meaning behind the photos and how the photographs reflect their experiences of the programme (at a future collective learning event - this will also act as a way for the funded partners to update around what they have been working on). Photos can be taken on phones to ensure funded partners don't need to buy any additional equipment.
- Blog pieces, research, reports, events
- Creative outputs

Questions and logs around the organisations that funded partners engage with in terms of interactions and meetings.

We will explore network analysis as a framework for this learning.

What topics are we keen to explore?

We are interested to learn about how collaborations between actors and sectors in the field are organically budding and what type of collaborations are occurring.



Learning Question 7

How are the funded partners influencing cultures for positive and lasting change?

What sources will we use?

We will use the Power Cube Framework Analysis to explore flows of visible, hidden, and invisible power as an exercise during our Collective Learning Events. By visible power we mean observable decision-making channels. By hidden power we mean the influence of who is setting the agenda. By invisible power we are interested in who is shaping meaning and what is acceptable.

We will use an Annual Funder Survey (pooled funders) to gather key reflections and takeaways for our co-funders, to consider the ways we may be influencing funding culture.

We will host a focus group with the implementation team where we will complete a timeline exercise, plotting key events and periods of change in the Power of Pop Fund pilot. Staff will be asked to track how they felt at each key point (positive above the line, negative below the line), and discuss the reasons behind the highs and lows.

We will continue to learn from the outputs and activities of our funded partners to see the narratives and topical themes they are engaging beneficiaries around. This could include: publications, creative outputs, films, pieces, research, events, development opportunities for creatives or change makers. We hope to gauge the responses to our funded partners using culture as a tool for justice, advocating for new and hopeful narratives, and demonstrating creative methods to advance social justice causes.

What topics are we keen to explore?

How are the activities of our funded partners challenging industry practice, procedures, and ways of working? Examples could include holding training for industry partners and working with industry partners to shift how narratives are created.

How are our funded partners influencing who gets a seat at the table? Examples could include supporting creatives into talent pipelines, supporting building leaders, increasing the visibility and legitimacy of racialised/marginalised communities' issues and voices, or working in partnership towards collective action.

How are our funded partners shifting mindsets, behaviour and action? This could include how other creatives see their place in the industry, their sense of self, their sense of acceptance or belonging, how is their work aiming to shift mindsets around a certain issue or community.

How are our funded partners influencing mainstream cultures and dominant narratives?

How have our funded partners contributed to the subculture and influenced who has a seat at the table/is able to build their own table?

Are the practices and investments of our co-funders evolving as a result of learning from the Power of Pop Fund?



**POWER OF
POP FUND**

Strategy
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