



# Building narrative and cultural change infrastructure in the UK: Learning from inspirational work in the US

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# INTRODUCTION

The Power of Pop (PoP) Fund has taken much inspiration from work that is underway in the US to develop the pop culture for social change field. This briefing paper explores the value of US work in this space and reflects on key lessons and questions that we should be considering as this field of work develops in the UK.

We are constantly surrounded by stories and narratives, whether that's through the news we consume, the social media we are immersed in, the games we play or the programmes and films we watch on our screens.

Dominant narratives shape the way we live as a society, including our ability to understand one another's experiences and complexities. They shape our willingness to welcome newcomers, our degrees of trust, and our propensity to care for our planet and for each other. Funders increasingly recognise that narrative change is a powerful tool for creating long lasting social and environmental change.

There is growing appreciation that the narratives we absorb through popular culture<sup>1</sup> profoundly shape our views and perceptions. Whether it's [Disney's Encanto](#) sparking positive conversations about refugees, Nida Manzoor's [We Are Lady Parts](#) busting stereotypes about Muslim women or Alice Oseman's webcomic (turned Netflix romance) [Heartstopper](#) normalising young gay and trans experiences, we are experiencing growing representation and diversification of narratives on our television and cinema screens. By influencing and shaping

narratives in popular culture, we can generate behavioural and attitudinal shifts that create momentum towards the social and environmental changes we aspire to achieve in the world around us.

The PoP Fund is a pooled fund (with investment from Comic Relief, Unbound Philanthropy, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Oak Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation), housed at Comic Relief, that is investing in narrative power and cultural change, specifically by funding organisations working at the intersection of pop culture, racial justice and migration in the UK. Our longer term objective is to build up the infrastructure in this space (which we refer to as 'pop culture for social change'<sup>2</sup>) in order to strengthen this field of work and embed it more thoroughly in the UK.

**By influencing and shaping narratives in popular culture, we can generate behavioural and attitudinal shifts that create momentum towards the social and environmental changes we aspire to achieve in the world around us.**

1. By pop culture we mean: "The conversations, big ideas, major narratives and immersive stories – films, TV, music, books, games, political speeches, journalism and more – experienced by mass audiences of millions of people every day" (as defined by the [Pop Culture Collaborative](#) in the US).

2. Pop culture for social change refers to: "Work that connects social and environmental justice to pop culture and entertainment. We take our lead from influential organisations in the US such as Pop Culture Collaborative that have carved out this niche and coined this term. We refer to this space as a 'field' and to the people and organisations working in this space as 'the ecosystem'." (as defined in the 2021 report: [New Brave World](#): The power, opportunities and potential of pop culture for social change in the UK, by Alice Sachrajda and Marzena Zukowska).

# US POP CULTURE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE ECOSYSTEM

Over the past fifteen years, cultural strategists in the US have played a vital role in establishing the pop culture for social change ecosystem and growing the infrastructure that is needed to sustain it in the longer term. There is a great deal we can learn about how to embed and develop this work in the UK from influential US-based organisations and thought leaders.

Bridgit Antoinette Evans, Chief Executive of the Pop Culture Collaborative, is a thought-leader in this field in the US and has developed a programme of work framed around the need for investment in pop culture for social change. She describes how we can ‘transform narrative oceans’ by investing in narrative and cultural change.



1. Bridgit Antoinette Evans ©Miles Maker



“If social justice movements hope to one day create a just and pluralist society in the US, the pop culture for social change field — storytellers, organisers, researchers, cultural strategists, and funders — must commit to the hard work of transforming the narrative oceans in which we all swim.”

Bridgit Antoinette Evans, Chief Executive, Pop Culture Collaborative

The work to grow the pop culture for social change ecosystem in the US began by developing a clear rationale for the work, [an early and ongoing investment in infrastructure](#) and a focus on partnerships, through to influencing content creation,

accountability and representation in the creative industries. We can understand this further by thinking about the questions below, which help to build up a picture of the broader ecosystem:

### ● Why invest in pop culture for social change?

An early focus for building this work in the US was to make the case for it to exist. This necessitated thought leadership, the development of a rationale for the work and how it relates to narrative power and cultural change, and in-depth and robust research and impact evaluations to demonstrate that it is worthy of sustained and ongoing investment. The need for this thought leadership and research is ongoing, and continually reinforces the value of the work.

### ● How to strengthen pop culture for social change infrastructure?

After making the case for the work, US cultural strategists and philanthropists began to work together to develop a funding model that would support activists and creatives to connect and work together and to fund a growing network of organisations working at the pop culture and social change intersection. A central focus is on creating and strengthening the infrastructure needed to develop this work further.

### ● Who is part of the pop culture for social change ecosystem?

The pop culture for social change field spans multiple sectors including philanthropy, social justice activism, movement building and the creative industries. A central focus in developing the work has been engaging with movements, fandoms and brokering connections with the entertainment industry. It has also involved bringing funders along on the journey and supporting them to understand and value this work through a dedicated 'donor learning journey'.

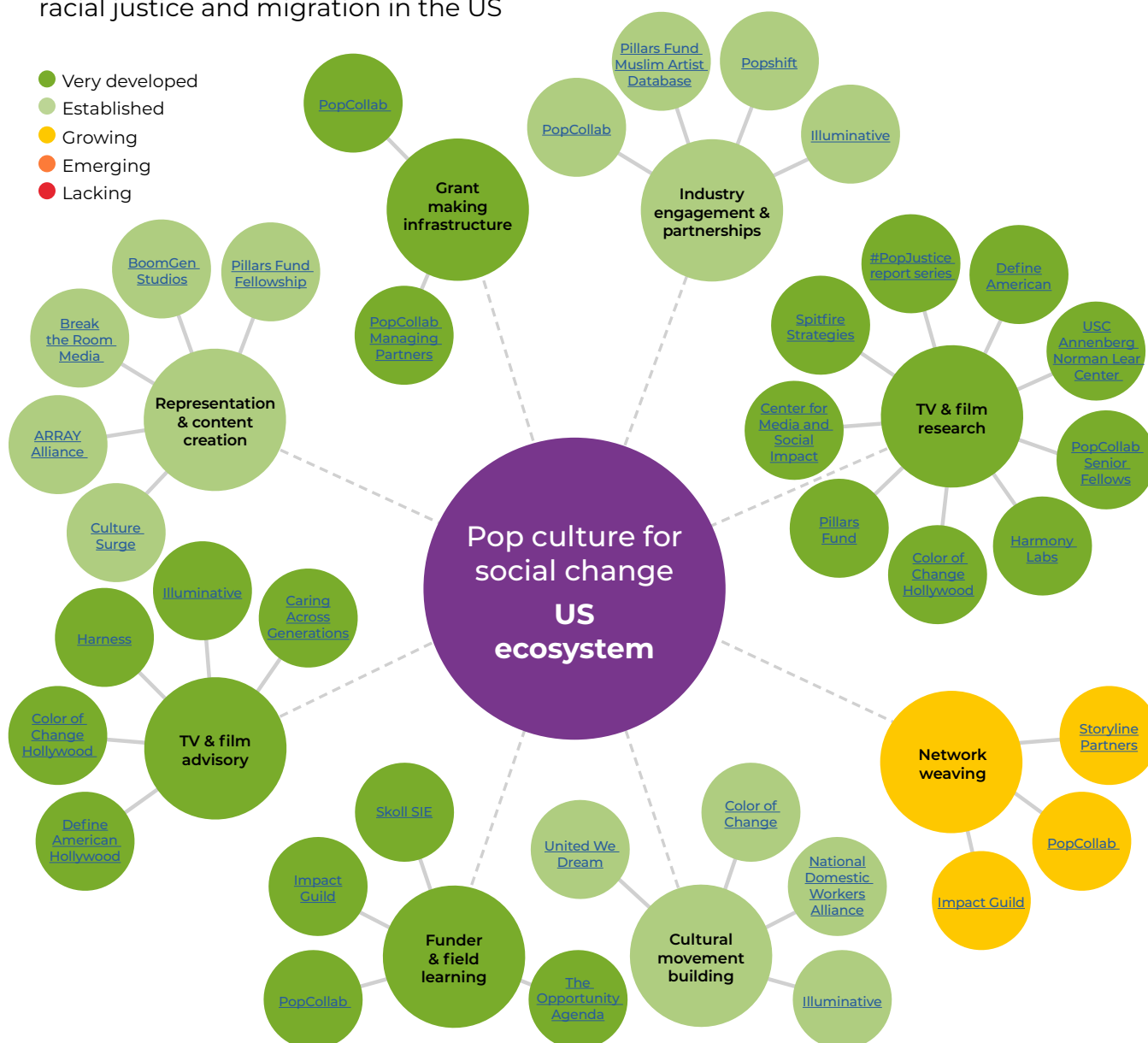
### ● What is pop culture for social change achieving?

Organisations working in the pop culture for social change space are disrupting traditional power structures that dictate who gets to create content. They are boosting representation, ensuring greater accountability, forging new pipelines into the creative industries from under-represented communities and informing entertainment content with lived experience and authentic narratives. Their work is reshaping the way that content is produced, distributed and understood by audiences.

The ecosystem map below visually illustrates the key development areas and the investment and engagement that is bolstering pop culture for social change work in the US. This map is by no means comprehensive and will no doubt contain many gaps, particularly as this field is constantly evolving. But it is helpful to illustrate the depth and breadth of the work underway in the US across multiple areas that are strengthening and reinforcing the ecosystem as a whole.

### US pop culture for social change ecosystem map:

A snapshot of some key organisations working at the intersection of pop culture, racial justice and migration in the US



This map is based on our own qualitative interpretation of the ecosystem and is not based on detailed, definitive analysis. We are aware that many organisations will span across multiple nodes and there will be many gaps in this snapshot. Our intention is to illustrate some of the scope and breadth of this exciting field of work and we hope to develop and iterate this mapping in future.

While we do understand that the funding climate in the US is different to the UK, not least in terms of availability of sustainable funding opportunities, we do feel it is worth reflecting on the evolution of the pop culture for social change ecosystem in the US.

There are numerous funders and organisations working in this space in the US – too many to cover in detail here. But in order to capture the leadership and scope of this work, below is a series of case studies that reflect on the work of influential players in the funding, voluntary and academic sectors in the US.

## Funder case study:

# THE POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE

The [Pop Culture Collaborative](https://popcollab.org/) (PopCollab) is a US-based donor collaborative and funder learning community working to transform the narrative landscape in the US around people of colour, immigrants, refugees, Muslims and Indigenous peoples, especially those who are women, queer, transgender and/or have a disability. Founded in 2016, the PopCollab supports the growth of the pop culture for social change field in the US through four programme areas: grantmaking, funder and field learning, network and partnership building and narrative design. Since its inception, the PopCollab has invested more than \$19 million across 300 grantees, senior fellows and entertainment industry partners to catalyse social change and collective power.

In 2022, the PopCollab published an evaluation of their first five years of grantmaking by [Engage R+D](#), which aimed to uncover 1) how the PopCollab's narrative infrastructure grantmaking has strengthened their grantees' organisations, teams and projects, and 2) what the PopCollab can do differently in future to better serve their grantees and the field.

The evaluation highlighted the following insights:

- Investing in Leadership Growth**  
 Grantees working to build the pop culture for social change field have received transformational guidance from the PopCollab about cultivating their voice and vision. As a result, grantees are advancing their work and growing their influence as leaders in the field.
- Capacity Building**  
 Grants support staff expansion, internal capacity building, field leadership and the ability to increase overall impact. However, key barriers for grantees included lack of consistent, coordinated large scale philanthropic funding and limited internal capacity.
- Research & Learning**  
 The PopCollab funding supports research and learning about the pop culture for social change field (e.g. developing theories of change, standardising terminology and metrics and defining terms), knowledge generation, creative development, innovation and experimentation.
- Field Coordination**  
 The pop culture for social change field (consisting of grantees, senior fellows and allied partners) provides community and connection for grantees. They value the connection and co-learning that takes place at the PopCollab's organised in-person gatherings.

<https://popcollab.org/learning/#strategyspotlights>





The evaluation also highlighted opportunities and recommendations to further build the capacity of the PopCollab's grantees and the pop culture for social change field, which includes involving grantees in strategic planning and seeking more community-driven approaches to funding. In addition, there are opportunities for strengthening impact by clarifying expectations and timelines for grantees and providing more tailored capacity building, field matchmaking (both of people and resources) and technical assistance. Finally, a key recommendation from grantees was to leverage the vast network of funders and media partners in a more focused or nuanced way so that grantees can be paired with the specific resources they need to advance their work.

It is clear that in the first five years of the PopCollab's grantmaking, it has scaffolded, resourced and nurtured the pop culture for social change field in the US from the ground up. It has tested out strategies and built a narrative framework that is now ready to scale.



“Evaluation and impact shouldn’t be about justifying if it’s worth funding narrative change. Instead, we must focus on the learnings and insights that inform and evolve a strategy towards long-term, transformational change. For example, at the Pop Culture Collaborative, we have learned the best approaches for organisational capacity building; how to support partnerships and collaborations that scale and expand narrative power; and how to best cultivate narrative networks that can seed new narrative oceans.”

Tracy Van Slyke, Chief Strategy Officer, Pop Culture Collaborative

Tracy Van Slyke ©Miles Maker



## Funder case study:

# PILLARS FUND

[Pillars Fund](#) is a grantmaking organisation that amplifies the leadership, narratives and talents of Muslims in the US to advance opportunities and justice for all. Pillars' [culture change work](#) supports Muslim storytellers intentionally reaching broader audiences with an abundance of narratives that tell the truth about their communities, to create a more receptive environment for Muslim social entrepreneurs to make meaningful change.

Pillars' programmes support and spotlight Muslim artists and creatives, such as through a new US-UK [artist fellowship programme](#) that is co-created with actor and musician Riz Ahmed and co-financed by Netflix and Amazon, and with a [database](#) of Muslim creatives in the filmmaking and storytelling industries that was developed in partnership with Disney.

Pillars also seeks to engage entertainment industry leaders to improve on-screen representation. It has partnered with the Geena Davis Institute, Muslim Casting and Muslim Girl on a new [on-screen test](#) for Muslim women in TV and film, and worked with the Ford Foundation and Riz Ahmed to commission a [landmark study](#) by Dr. Stacy L. Smith and the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative on the prevalence and portrayal of Muslim characters on-screen.

In response to these research findings, Pillars worked with this coalition to spearhead the creation of the [Blueprint for Muslim Inclusion](#), which provides film industry professionals with guidance on how to support Muslim stories and storytellers and has led to engagement with companies from WMA to Amazon Studios.



“We believe that by telling more honest and nuanced stories about our communities, we can reclaim our histories and reimagine our futures as Muslims. Since its inception, Pillars has financially supported Muslim organisations and leaders. As we bolstered our grantmaking, we realised that to achieve our mission, it was no longer sufficient to only invest in civic causes. We also had to consider damaging narratives about Muslims that make the work of Muslim-focused organisations significantly more difficult. Pillars' culture change work supports those who are intentionally reaching broader audiences with an abundance of different narratives, in turn creating a better environment for Muslims to make meaningful change.”

[Pillars Fund](#)



## Culture change case study:

# COLOR OF CHANGE

[Color Of Change](#) is a US-based racial justice campaigning organisation powered by more than 1.5 million members, driving change on major issues that affect Black people's lives.

[Color Of Change Hollywood](#) is a multi-year initiative to change the written and unwritten rules in the media that shape content development, production, distribution and impact. Color of Change has sought to change racist, dangerous and inaccurate stereotypes about Black people and Black communities in the media, television and film. These on-screen stereotypes, from associations with criminality to whitewashing Black characters, have long reinforced ideas that hold back progress on racial justice and impact how Black people are treated by employers, judges, police and society at large.

Through its work with the entertainment industry, Color of Change has had major wins. By investing in trusting relationships in the entertainment industry, the organisation has consulted on numerous high profile shows, including the first police brutality storyline featured on ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*.

Color of Change Hollywood is focusing its efforts across six main areas:

- **Changing the rules across the industry**

Color of Change is dedicated to building power for Black writers, producers and creators. It works to raise industry standards around hiring and representation, resulting in more authentic portrayals of Black people and issues on-screen, more nuanced Black stories, more diversity in writers' rooms and real accountability when media companies cross the line.

- **Consulting for TV and film**

Color of Change collaborates with writers, producers and executives to ensure characters and storylines are multi-dimensional and authentic. It consults on projects at any point in the development process, from briefing writers on issues like criminal justice, gentrification and Black families, to collaborating on storylines and advising on rough cuts and scripts.

- **Creating accountability**

The Media, Democracy, and Economic Justice team holds companies accountable for racist content. Color of Change has led successful accountability campaigns to cancel the long-running show *COPS* on FOX and to pressure Disney to change Princess Tiana's depiction in *Wreck-It-Ralph* after her appearance was changed to look less Black in *The Princess and the Frog*.

- **Partnering with influential artists**

Color of Change works with top talent in Hollywood and the entertainment industry to leverage their voices, for example by collaborating on videos that educate and move people to action, making powerful statements in the media and supporting campaigns for racial justice.



- **Commissioning game-changing research**

Color of Change commissions original, independent research on problems in Hollywood tied to race and gender. Its 2017 [Race in the Writers' Room](#) report revealed how few shows give voice to Black writers, and almost none have Black showrunners. Its crime TV report, [Normalizing Injustice](#), was the first full analysis of the genre, exposing how popular shows reinforce beliefs that perpetuate violent policing and mass incarceration. Research allows Color of Change to confront decision makers with real data and build momentum for change among industry insiders.

- **Creating #TellBlackStories**

Color of Change produces original content that elevates issues that are important to Black communities, which it promotes in the media and to its 1.5 million members. In 2018, it launched its [#TellBlackStories](#) podcast and video series to create a forum for Black storytellers to dive into the issues that matter most. It showcases Black writers, actors, directors and changemakers from Ava DuVernay and dream hampton to Common and the cast of Queen Sugar.



“Five to 10 years from now, I hope we will have shifted the way writers’ rooms portray Black stories, amplified the voices of cultural influencers wishing to elevate social justice, and incentivise nuanced Black storytelling. I hope that we will be on the road to seeing more images that fully reflect our society. The work we will continue to lead at Color of Change will help inspire, support and move important content that may otherwise be ignored, even if it means producing our own.”

**Rashad Robinson, President,  
Color of Change**



Rashad Robinson  
©PHOTOGRAPH BY KRIS GRAVES

## Culture change case study:

# DEFINE AMERICAN IN COLLABORATION WITH THE NORMAN LEAR CENTER

[Define American](#) and the [Norman Lear Center](#) provide a powerful example of successful collaboration between organisations working to influence and change storytelling in the US entertainment industry. This can be seen in their groundbreaking research into immigrant representation in television. Define American is a culture change organisation that uses the power of narrative to humanise conversations about immigrants through research, entertainment partnerships, digital storytelling and storyteller advocacy. The Norman Lear Center is an academic research and public policy centre which aims to study and influence the entertainment industry through testimony, journalism, strategic research and innovative public outreach campaigns.

In their third groundbreaking research report into immigrant representation in television, [Change the Narrative, Change the World](#) (2022), Define American and the Norman Lear Center aim to understand both how often and how well immigrant characters are represented on television and streaming platforms. They analysed 167 characters across 169 episodes of 79 scripted series that aired between 1st July 2020 and 30th June 2022 and surveyed 1,272 US television viewers of four shows that centre immigrant experiences: *Bob Hearts Abishola* (CBS), *Never Have I Ever* (Netflix), *Roswell, New Mexico* (The CW) and *The Cleaning Lady* (FOX).

Over four years of research, their findings show shifts – both positive and negative – in immigrant representation on television:

- Representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) immigrant characters on television has more than doubled since their 2020 study, however, specifically Pacific Islander, or Pasifika, representation is lacking and is often erased from broader AAPI discourses.
- There were twice as many Black immigrant characters on television in 2022 than there were in 2020, including three Black undocumented characters, which was not seen in the previous research.
- Representation of Latinx immigrant characters has plummeted since 2020, despite the fact that Latinx immigrants comprise 44% of all US immigrants.
- There were some improvements in representation of communities that were previously erased from the US television landscape, such as immigrants with disabilities, undocumented Black immigrant characters and transgender immigrant characters. However, there is still a long way to go towards meaningful representation.
- The number of immigrant characters associated with crime is at an all-time high – six times as many immigrant characters were featured in crime shows and procedurals in 2022 when compared to 2020.

The research concluded that:

- Increased representation is not always better. When immigrant characters are depicted in reductive or stereotypical ways, audiences could develop inaccurate perceptions of immigrants and their experiences.
- Viewers of shows that centre immigrant experiences had a deeper understanding of real immigrants' lives, the sacrifices they make to emigrate and more positive attitudes toward immigrants in the US.
- In almost all cases, the impact of being exposed to the four aforementioned shows was the same across audiences of varying political ideologies.
- The more shows with regular or reoccurring immigrant characters that viewers watched, the more they reported:
- Believing that diversity is a valuable asset to society
- Knowledge of immigration-related issues
- Taking actions in support of immigrants in the US in the last year

Define American and the Norman Lear Center's work in this field demonstrates that television is a powerful storytelling tool, as it can be used to create meaningful connections between fictional characters and captive audiences. It can also help viewers understand how to feel about other cultures and people with differing worldviews from their own.



“We need to bridge the gap between research and practice because they are currently disconnected. Research is often viewed as jargony and inaccessible by practitioners, but it’s essential to bring together researchers and practitioners working in the pop culture for social change field to create narrative change in a way that’s mutually beneficial.”

Sarah E. Lowe, Director of Research and Impact, Define American



Jose Antonio Vargas, founder of Define American  
<https://defineamerican.com> ©Getty Images



# UK POP CULTURE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE ECOSYSTEM

By contrast to the US, the UK pop culture for social change ecosystem is nascent and emergent, but is showing exciting promise. Here we identify where there is valuable work underway and what needs to happen to grow and strengthen this ecosystem in the future.

The PoP Fund has begun to invest in organisations working on pop culture for social change and is partnering with a group of funders who are all keen to explore and learn about how to develop this area of work. By asking the same

questions about the development of the ecosystem as we did in the US context, we can begin to see how this work is emerging in the UK and where there is potential, as well as where there are gaps:

## ● Why invest in pop culture for social change?

Two Unbound Philanthropy-funded reports have helped to make the case for why pop culture for social change is a field that requires investment in the UK: [Riding the Waves](#) and [New Brave World](#). The resulting funder interest led to the creation of the PoP Fund housed at Comic Relief. A key focus for the PoP Fund is on learning and evaluation and this is integrally woven into the PoP Fund through the appointment of a Learning Coordinator working with both the funding and funded partners. But there is currently a gap around broader pop culture for social change research, such as that undertaken by US organisations like the Pop Culture Collaborative, Pillars Fund, Color of Change, Define American and the Norman Lear Center (as explored in the case studies above). Substantive, in-depth research needs to be commissioned if we are to make the longer term case for this work with funders and to ensure buy-in from and engagement with the creative industries.

## ● How to strengthen the pop culture for social change infrastructure?

There is work underway to develop the pop culture for social change infrastructure in the UK. This includes the work of the PoP Fund to invest in organisations who are already established in this space, such as [Heard](#) (which is working to sensitively embed an approach that values and respects lived experience in media and entertainment), [Counterpoints Arts](#) (which is connecting migrant creatives with writers' rooms) and [OKRE](#) (which is brokering connections between creatives and knowledge sectors through events and workshops). But there is more work to be done to connect, network and fund initiatives that are working to build narrative power. This is an area that will need intentional and sustained investment moving forwards.



## ● Who is part of the pop culture for social change ecosystem?

There is valuable work underway to create bridges between industries and seek out funders, activists, academics, creatives, movement builders and others who are navigating ways to create narrative and cultural change. There is still work needed to coordinate across and between industries (such as through a UK-based network that connects organisations working in writers' rooms, like the US-based initiative [StoryLine Partners](#), for example) and there is potential for greater connection with movement builders and campaigners so as to align cultural change work with broader movements for racial and migrant justice.

## ● What is pop culture for social change achieving?

This work takes time and must be founded on deep respect and trust, as per the work of [We Are Bridge](#) (which supports talent and the industry to work together effectively at all stages of production). In addition, there are efforts underway to platform artists and creatives from underrepresented communities as carried out by [Skin Deep](#) (which is a platform for cultural production) and to support, coordinate and network People of Colour and migrant creatives working in the industry, such as through the [2POCC community](#). All of which are funded partners of the PoP Fund. However, there is scope for more engagement in writers' rooms, more initiatives that champion cultural content from diverse and underrepresented artists, better representation in the creative industries and greater efforts to challenge outdated and stereotypical portrayals in entertainment.



Counterpoints Arts, No Direction Home  
<https://popchange.co.uk/> @Counterpoints Arts

The ecosystem map below demonstrates where there is work underway and where there is room for greater focus in the UK. This map is by no means comprehensive. We are conscious that there is a growing number of organisations, thought leaders and initiatives in this space and we are excited about the prospect of this ecosystem developing and evolving. This is an attempt to illustrate some of the areas where pop culture for social change work is emerging in the UK and to show where there are areas that need to be strengthened in order to reinforce the ecosystem as a whole.

### UK pop culture for social change ecosystem map:

A snapshot of some key organisations working at the intersection of pop culture, racial justice and migration in the UK



This map is based on our own qualitative interpretation of the ecosystem and is not based on detailed, definitive analysis. We are aware that many organisations will span across multiple nodes and there will be many gaps in this snapshot. Our intention is to illustrate some of the scope and breadth of this exciting field of work and we hope to develop and iterate this mapping in future.

# KEY LESSONS FROM THE US CONTEXT FOR THE UK TO REFLECT ON

In the UK we have much to learn from the evolving pop culture for social change work in the US. There is compelling evidence, as demonstrated by the case studies above, to show how influential and impactful this work can be. Below we set out some key lessons and questions that we should be considering as this field of work begins to develop in the UK.

It is worthwhile comparing the pop culture for social change ecosystems in the US and the UK. However we need to be mindful that there are substantial differences. A significant difference, for instance, is that the UK has a very different approach to broadcasting in comparison to the US because of its public service model; in the UK, all TV-watching households must pay a licence fee. Another difference is that US-based trusts and foundations are bigger and more substantial and can make larger investments, which has led to faster, deeper growth of the pop culture for social change field. Given the vastly different climates, we cannot compare the two systems 'like for like'.

Despite these fundamental differences, there is still value in reflecting on the steps that US organisations and funders have taken to grow and develop the pop culture for social change field.

The pop culture for social change field in the US has credibility because it has become adept at justifying why this work is needed and brings value. Organisations like the Pop Culture Collaborative and Pillars Fund have recognised the importance of early stage learning and research in order to build up the rationale for pop culture for social change work, both with other funders and with the creative industries.

- How can we strengthen the evidence base for pop culture for social change work in the UK?
- How can we encourage academics and universities to become more engaged in this field?
- How can we ensure a breadth and diversity of research engagement, such as through fellowship schemes that span different industries and geographies?
- How can we make research outputs engaging and accessible to appeal to nonacademic audiences?

In the US, cultural change strategists understand the role that narrative change plays in creating social and environmental change. Narrative has become a buzz word in recent years (leading to discussions of narrative change, narrative power, narrative infrastructure, narrative systems, narrative practitioners, narrative immersion, etc.) both in the US and the UK. But in the US, the recognition of the power of narratives is deeply woven into the approach of cultural change work.

- How can we ensure that UK funders interested in investing in narrative change work recognise that pop culture for social change is narrative change in practice?
- What can we learn from the Pop Culture Collaborative which [frames its funding around narrative shifts](#) – for example, investing in work that moves away from narratives of scarcity towards narratives of abundance?
- How can the pop culture for social change field support the creative industries to not only boost representation and talent pipelines to make it more diverse on and off screen, but also to ensure there is greater appreciation of the power and impact of the narratives it puts out into the world?

The Pop Culture Collaborative recognises that in order to achieve narrative immersion and truly change the ‘narrative ocean we are swimming in’, we need to invest in and sustain narrative infrastructure. This means carrying out detailed scoping to 1) understand the ecosystem and explore how to cultivate leaders, 2) support narrative landscape analysis, 3) fund organisational hubs and network weaving, 4) resource artist-led and field-led pipelines, 5) invest in innovation relating to production and distribution, and 6) build connection and community.

- How can we invest in leadership and ensure these leaders have the capacity and skills they need to have a sustainable impact and legacy within the industry?
- What narrative infrastructure gaps are there in the UK? Specifically, what new hubs and networks are needed?
- What needs to happen to be able to fund innovation and more creative ways of working in the pop culture for social change space?
- How can we ensure that our evaluation processes go beyond individual projects to explore how the ecosystem is developing as a whole?

We will work with our partners and advisers to explore these questions in order to investigate how we can grow the infrastructure of this work in the UK. It is important to understand where there are gaps and where further work needs to be supported so that we can build this field and strengthen the ecosystem.

# CONCLUSION

The pop culture for social change field is at an exciting juncture in the UK. There is acknowledgement from funders that this work has value and requires ongoing and sustained investment. But there is still work to be done to strengthen and build the ecosystem.

The PoP Fund is not only investing in organisations carrying out pop culture for social change work, but it is also developing a learning programme that is enhancing the understanding of the work and helping to build up the infrastructure to sustain it in the longer term. A key part of that learning includes reflecting on the work elsewhere in this space, particularly in the US where it is more established and advanced.

By reflecting on work in the US, we recognise that in order to build the pop culture for social change field we must develop a clear rationale for the work that is grounded in evidence. This will help us to generate interest from funders and from the creative industries in order to secure further investment. We will also endeavour to communicate the work framed around narrative change and to focus our efforts on establishing the infrastructure for this work, particularly by investing in leadership and evaluating the pop culture for social change ecosystem as a whole.



“The pop culture for social change field in the US is deeply inspiring. We are excited to see how US visionaries and organisations continue to challenge industry standards and break down barriers for marginalised creatives. Learning from the US context enables us to imagine how this work could grow in the UK and we are confident that with dedicated investment and infrastructure support the UK pop culture for social change field will flourish.”

Alice Sachrajda and Saphia Youssef



# POWER OF POP FUND

The Power of Pop (PoP) Fund is a pooled UK fund supported by Comic Relief, Unbound Philanthropy, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Oak Foundation. The PoP Fund supports organisations working at the intersection of popular culture and social change, with a particular focus on migration and racial justice.

The first cohort of funded partners is made up of: 2POCC, Skin Deep and We Are Bridge. The second cohort is made up of: Counterpoints Arts, Heard and OKRE. Collectively, their inspiring work amplifies the experiences and testimonies of Black, People of Colour (POC), migrant, refugee and marginalised creatives through bespoke support, network building and cultural production.

Alice Sachrajda is a Cultural Strategy Consultant advising the PoP Fund and Saphia Youssef is the PoP Fund Learning Coordinator. With thanks to Emma Frobisher, Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Manager at Comic Relief, for editing this briefing paper.

