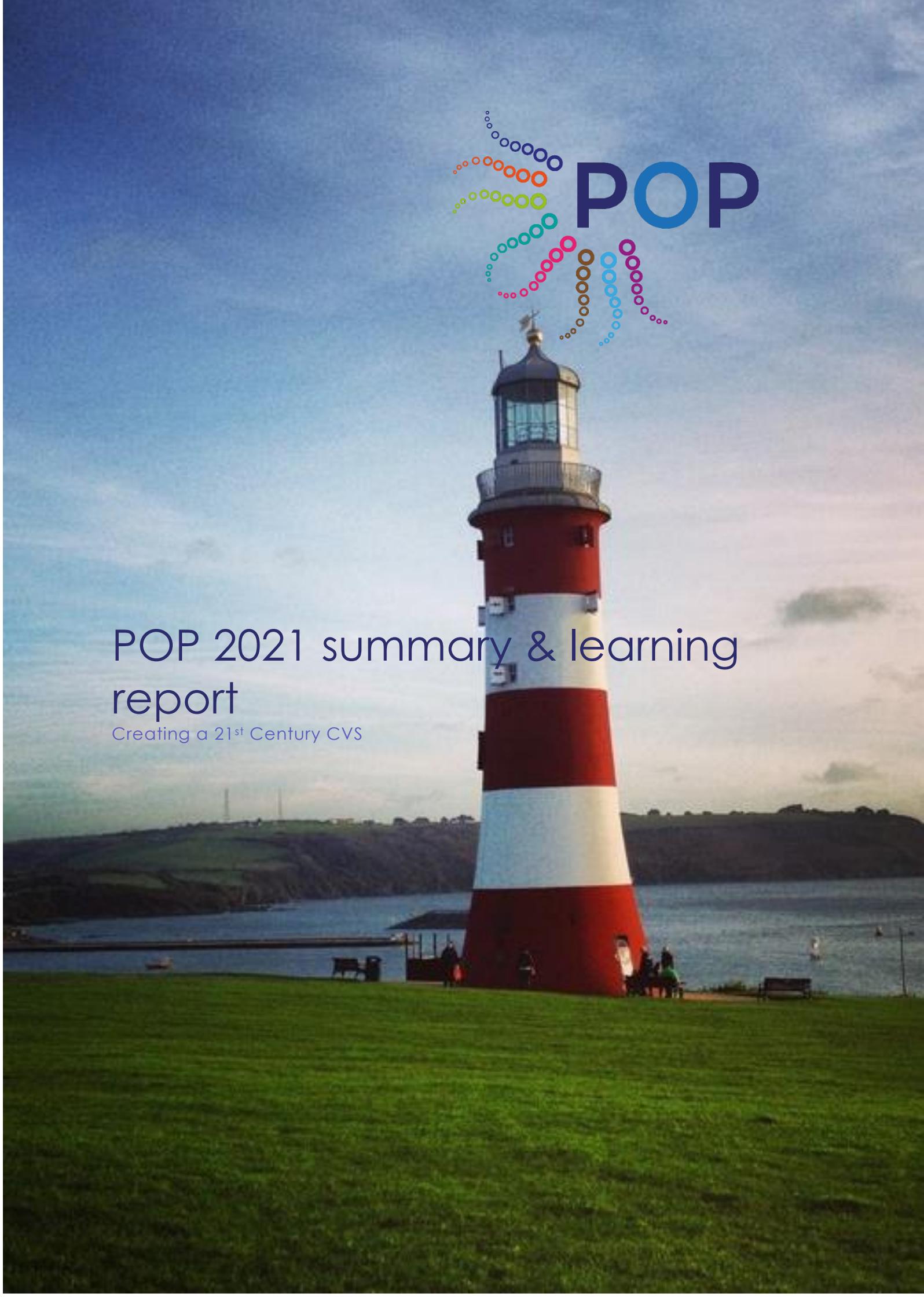




POP 2021 summary & learning report

Creating a 21st Century CVS



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2 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this document is to capture some of the activities, lessons, and reflections from the last 3 years since Plymouth received the £1.3 million investment from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (EFF).

This report sets out the evolution of POP's overall approach before going on to explore our learning through four main mechanisms of change.

- Building connections & effective networks
- Collaboration
- Strengthening skills and capacity
- Testing new ways of funding

In each section we will cover what has been done, the challenges, the reflections, and the resolutions.

The report will finish by covering POPs own development and a look to the future.

3 THE EVOLUTION OF POP'S OVERALL APPROACH

POP started life as a project of the Zebra Collective. From 2013 to 2017, its focus was on building connections between the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that existed in Plymouth, and then supporting the sector to influence decision making with an explicit focus on building networks.

When EFF began discussions with POP in 2017, the language of 'creating a '21st Century CVS' (Council for Voluntary Services) was introduced:

"As regards the structural support, we're keen to explore further the idea of 'a CVS for the 21st Century'.... Ideas that came up for us were the role of the organisation in brokering, advocacy, coordinating, facilitating new relationships, providing a place for thinking and incubation of ideas, as well as the broader points about being a single point of access and a mechanism for equalising the relationship of the VCS with the local authority. In practice though, what would this look like? We'd encourage you to think flexibly here. ... We're open to hearing thoughts on how the organisation can remain nimble but still have the desired strategic impact."

Esmee Fairbairn April 2017

At the time POP expected that its response to this challenge would include:

- Thematic networks - Running networks where organisations with shared interests could gather information, work collectively, share resources, campaign for change and co-design services. an organisation that primarily had a facilitating role
- Better use of technology – Valuing face to face relationships, but also wishing to use social media and digital technology to its fullest extent.

- A conduit for information – Delivering information for the sector e.g., via newsletters and social media.
- Community voice – Community Development and Community Engagement, and making the decision making and delivery of services in Plymouth a responsibility of all its people.
- Building capacity in communities – Supporting smaller community organisations, and those active in geographic areas.

All these remain important themes in POP's thinking. But the vision of our own role has shifted over the years, away from the idea of POP as 'a conductor for the orchestra' towards a much more distributed model of power and leadership that 'cultivates the garden and tends the soil'. The Octopus reaches in deep with its arms and supports the conditions for supportive collaborative action at all levels of the system.

In 2017 Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) invested £1.3m into Plymouth and asked POP to steward the use of the funding, aiming for these three outcomes acting into the role of a 21st Century CVS:

1. The needs of people in Plymouth are more effectively addressed.
2. The quality and capacity of the local voluntary sector is improved.
3. More effective and equal partnership working between voluntary, public and private sectors to achieve change in the city.

To influence this scale of change with only £1.3m takes a new way of working. Our learning since 2017 has developed the following logical underpinning for everything we do:

- The biggest issues, environmentally and socially, are complex.
- No one actor or set of actors can create the change we need.
- Networks and collaboration at a citizen and organisational level, and the behaviours required to enable them to be effective, are most likely to allow the changes to emerge.

We are increasingly certain that a 21st Century CVS is first and foremost concerned with fostering and facilitating the environment necessary for positive relationships, collective working, and collaboration – growing and strengthening the web of ideas, energy and commitment within Plymouth to drive effective action towards collective social goals.

3.1 WHY NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION?

June Holley is an internationally known expert in building effective networks. She has produced a list¹ of why effective networks are more useful in our context than other forms of organisation:

- Improve information flow.
- Increase communication and awareness of relationships.
- Open new resources
- Expand and support leadership.

¹ <https://networkweaver.com/product/why-networks/>

- Encourage collaboration, innovation, and learning for breakthroughs.
- Increase inclusion and bridge divides.
- Result in better outcomes.
- Facilitate scale and impact.

This distributed approach to leadership, control and power allows the best solutions to emerge as a direct result of 'smoother' information flow from all relevant sources and skills and strengths matching that allows action to happen. These networks then act as amplifiers for successful tests, relatively unmediated by existing power bases.

Academic research currently being carried out by the Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University features POP as a case study. The study, <https://www.humanlearning.systems/>, will be publishing a further report uses many real-life examples to show why collaboration and new approaches are critical to moving beyond the current ways of working and to truly achieve the outcomes we seek.

3.2 A VALUES & ETHICS DRIVEN APPROACH

Central to building connections, networks and collaborations is a very close focus on values and ethics. We are committed to building and strengthening trust and relationships, collaborating with others and being innovative. With all our work we strive to learn - and encourage learning through our actions. We bring these ethical principles into everything we do – our partnerships, our network and skills development work, our funding, and our work together as a team.

3.3 OVERARCHING PRIORITIES AND FOCUS

POP recognises the value of 'going with the energy' – of identifying, supporting, and building on ideas and initiatives that motivate those involved and carry their own momentum for change. But we are also committed to an inclusive sector and to a voice for all in the debate on shaping a better future for Plymouth. In all areas of our work, we actively seek opportunities to push forward on three key concerns:

Reaching and supporting grassroots activity – COVID-19 has brought home just how vital a healthy and vibrant community infrastructure is. POP has made this a priority from the start of its EFF funding, investing in skills development, building, and connecting networks, micro funding grass roots initiatives, and engaging the change makers of the future.

Diversity and inclusion – POP strive to create a platform and an approach for all voices to heard. We seek to learn from the wide range of ideas and approaches that can be applied to through empowering everyone to be input into the collective. More is to be done and will be done.

Participatory processes - In a culture dominated by the idea of the 'heroic' individual leader, POP is firmly convinced that progress to resolve complex social and environmental challenges will only be achieved by embracing the power of 'We'. In everything we do, we champion open, collaborative, peer-led, participative processes and decision making as the norm.

3.4 THE VALUE OF CORE FUNDING

The biggest single gift that the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation has given POP is the flexibility to learn how to best support the Plymouth VCS sector. This has been entirely due to the core grant with few restrictions on how it was to be used. Led by a simple mission and clear values there has been a steady move forwards in our understanding of how to make the most effective contribution to change in Plymouth. Being given time to experiment, has enabled POP to better test, learn and review its efforts. This has led to new funds such as the Healthy Communities Together and new networks, such as the Plymouth Neighbourhood and Community Network and the Neighbourhood Care Networks. All of which has also helped to make us more confident in our work.

3.5 IN SUMMARY

In the simplest of terms, the reflections and learning in the rest of this report are underpinned by the following beliefs:

- In complex environments, healthy networks and collaboration at all levels are fundamental to achieving social change.
- Values, ethics and 'the way we do things' matter.
- Investing in grassroots infrastructure, in diversity and inclusion are both moral and practical imperatives.
- A distributed, inclusive approach to leadership, control and power allows the best solutions to emerge.
- Not everything works well – but the only true failure is to fail to learn and try to do better next time.

4 BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND EFFECTIVE NETWORKS

4.1 WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

In 2013 Zebra Collective won the contract from Plymouth City Council to deliver the VCS support and enable the sector to have a voice and influence strategic decisions. The project was called Plymouth Octopus Project (POP). The drive behind this new project was originally,

a) link organisations and get them working together and knowing what each other did and

b) getting their grassroots voice heard.... speaking truth to power, moving to contributing constructively to co-designing and delivering what the city needed.

Although networks were not new in Plymouth - Plymouth Social Enterprise Network and Food Plymouth were already significant networks - when POP was established there was frustration from certain groups of organisations at the lack of connections in the sector, lack of a voice with key stakeholders such as Plymouth City Council and decisions made in small exclusive circles.

Early examples of this work included the Health and Wellbeing Network, a direct response to the development of Health and Wellbeing Boards. Frustration in the city that cultural decisions were made by a select few organisations led to the formation of the Culture and Arts Network (CAN). Both networks aimed to nominate representatives onto critical decision-making bodies.

This way of working developed over the next 3 years and by then networks were central to POPs functioning. Some networks lost momentum, others established around heritage, children and young people, refugees and asylum seekers, sports, environment, and community justice.

In 2018 a long-time ambition was put into motion and conversations started to establish a Plymouth Neighbourhood and Community Network (PNCN). In the same year, the grant programme via the EFF grant was launched, and 7 networks were funded to develop and reach out to new members.

From 2019 to now alongside the 'formal' networks, POPs connections into the sector and city continued to develop and grow.

Strategically the Plymouth Partners & Funders Forum still meets as a useful and productive forum to exchange information around the state of the sector, funding, and commissioning activity.

4.2 CROWNING ACHIEVEMENTS

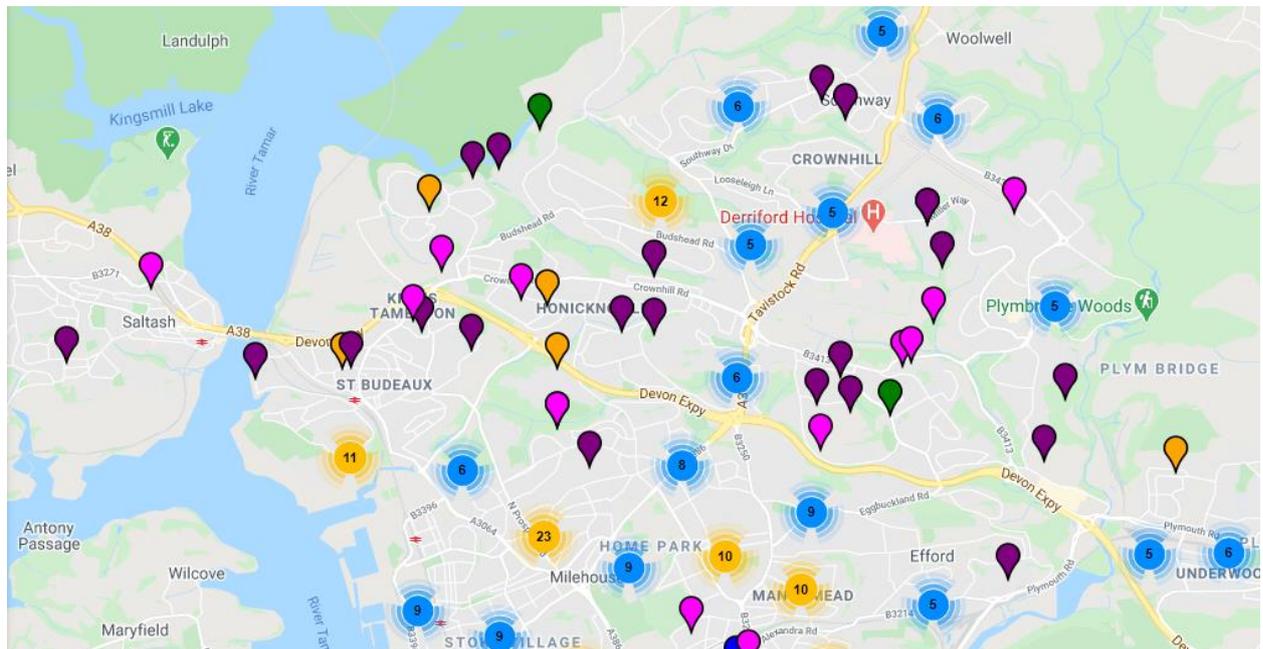
4.2.1 A growing reach into grassroots organisations

POP has always invested on building relationships with and supporting grassroots organisations and has steadily increased contact with these organisations. To encourage even greater participation, engagement in POP and improve sector

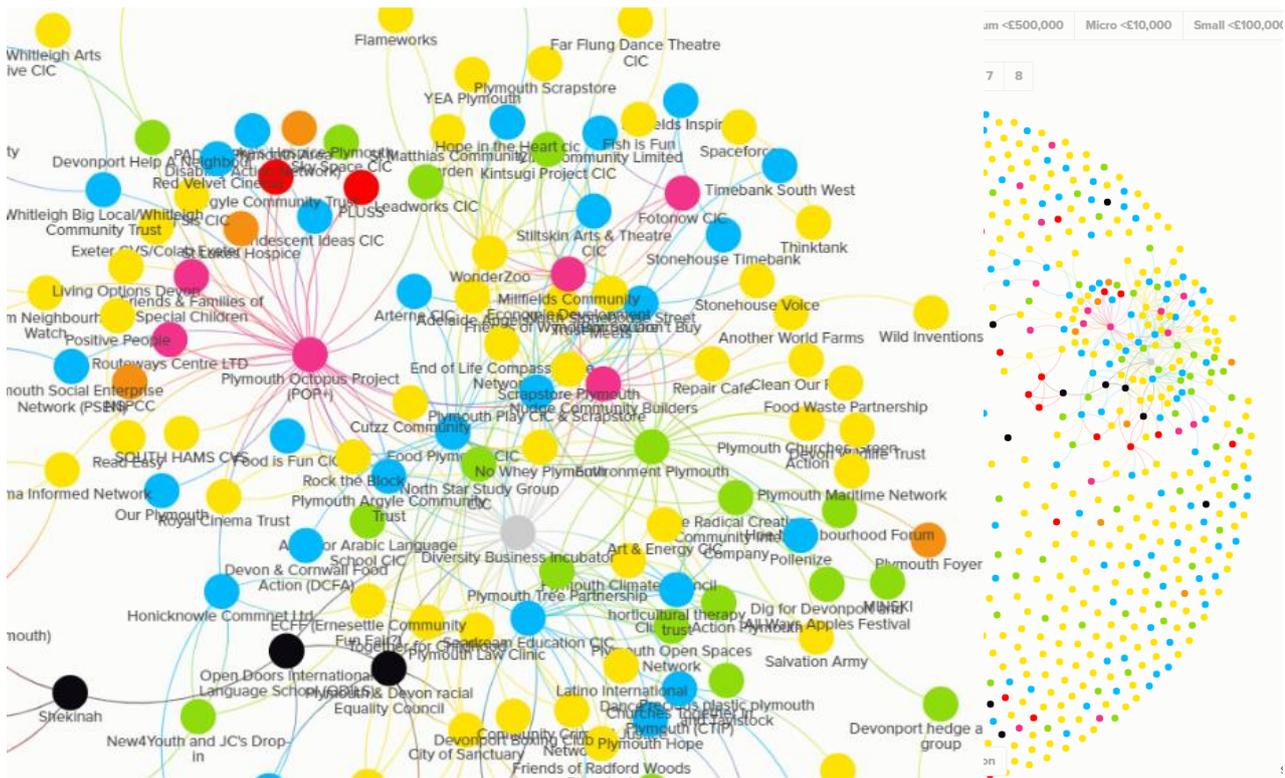
intelligence, POP Trustees agreed that, to receive POP support and (some of our) funding, we would make membership of POP, which is free, mandatory.



There has been a significant rise in the number of 'micro' organisations (income less than £10k) which have joined in the last 12 months. Small (under £100k annual turnover) and micro-organisations (under £10k annual turnover) now constitute nearly 70% of the membership. Capacity building data also shows a health and growing level of engagement. We have increased support to smaller organisations – 80% of our support now reaches organisations under £100k annual turnover. POP is now starting to use the data to chart progress in making and building connections:



Export from [geographically mapping POP contacts](#)



Export from [POPs relationship map](#)

As data quality improves, we will be able to start tracking the extent of the connections across the city. This could be significantly enhanced by the development of a digital collaborative platform for civic use.

“The volume of organisations working in Plymouth is a great benefit, but it is also a problem... POP has encouraged cooperation and connectivity into a pretty fragmented VCS.”

Devonport group leader

4.2.2 Responding to Covid

The response to COVID-19 has used all of POP's strengths and we have used it to further expand our reach:

Connected strategically.

- To feed in intelligence and distribute information and guidance.
- Plymouth City Council approached POP to carry out a survey of the VCSE sector to inform the distribution of grants and decision making.
- Worked with Plymouth City Council and other partners to respond positively and support the most vulnerable through the Good Neighbours Scheme and Caring for Plymouth.
- Worked with the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Board helping to make connections and get messages out and feedback what is happening in the community groups.
- Linked with NAVCA to relay intelligence and recommendations.

- Linked with funders locally, regionally, and nationally to relay intelligence and recommendations.

Communication.

- Create a dedicated Facebook page so that we might quickly and effectively convey information to community groups.
- POP now has a page in every Plymouth Chronicle to shout about the work of small groups in Plymouth. With a circulation of over 92,000 this is an important communication tool.

Developed networks.

- Launched in the first lockdown and in partnership with a range of local organisations, the initial Neighbourhood Care Networks, networks of hyper local community organisations have evolved and been replicated in other areas of the city.
- Used technology to the fullest: Slack for open communication, information sharing and connecting between networks; Twilio for community phone lines and text support; Open Collective for micro-grants; Salesforce (database) to identify groups to contact.

Slack was used effectively by the City Council to find lots of food larders/meals to create the food aid network. Now POP is just a member of the food aid network and does not have to act as a 'bottleneck' for communications.

- Set up weekly Torchbearer (network 'leaders') calls to promote peer support.
- Now existing neighbourhood networks have started mentoring new neighbourhood networks.

Capacity building.

- Within 2 days started Zoom training (trained 71 people from 67 organisations).
- Used the survey to identify those in urgent need (Of the 125 survey respondents we have contacted 74 and directly supported 35).
- Moved existing training online.

POP started having conversations in Efford with people already working there about the potential for an NCN. Using its database and the Facebook group, POP contacted a church that was creating a food bank. The church only knew a small number of people in their community and POP was able to link them with a housing association, a youth group, an art project, and a boxing club all of which wanted to do something to help people in their community affected by the pandemic. POP brought them together. POP hosted a series of online meetings then stepped aside to let them get on with it. The housing association and youth club identified the families in need in the area and the boxing club volunteers delivered the food from the food bank at the church. Subsequently, POP connected the church with the Plymouth-wide Food Aid network to support them with food supplies and guidance on operating effectively.

"There are a few of us working in Efford who have been trying to set up a community group for about 18 months, but we were struggling. It felt as if we'd get so far and then come up against a wall. Now we are in regular contact with other people who are telling us what they've done; what they've set up and how they went about it. And the difference that has made to each of us – and how we feel about it – has been nothing short of inspirational."

Dee Kelly, a Senior Professional Youth Worker

POP has used a technology called Twilio to set up community phone lines that have enabled relationships to be built between neighbours. Those that have been connected may never know about POP, but they have expressed a lot of gratitude for the relationship with local volunteer(s) that has sustained them over the pandemic.

"POP has worked tirelessly connecting up different organisations across Plymouth and helping new groups support their local area over COVID"

4.3 CHALLENGES, HURDLES, AND REFLECTIONS

Networks are:

"a group or system of interconnected people or things."

The last 8 years has been a journey in discovering how best POP can play a role in connecting VCSE organisations across Plymouth. POP has set up, facilitated, and observed networks in Plymouth. From this POP has a strong sense of both what works and our role in that:

- Capacity. It is easy to underestimate the admin, organisation and therefore time to set up networks. We quickly realised that most of the work needed to be done by the networks themselves, yet this requires the network to absorb this work and we experience reluctance for people to take the lead, so POP can step back.
- Shared purpose. The two networks set up with an expressed purpose around representation, Health & Wellbeing Network and the Culture and Arts Network have ceased running. Was the shared purpose strong enough to keep these networks running?
- Broad reach/critical mass. Some networks remained small and over reliant on one person. It is likely why these networks have ceased functioning.
- Routes to power. Having spokespeople well placed, recognised, and well regarded by decision makers is important to having a strategic impact.
- Networks must have more than one 'bridge' or spokesperson. When relationships fail, it is important to have multiple ways out of and into a network. In POPs experience on one occasion a degradation between two

people impacted indirectly on the memberships of two networks as closer working became much more difficult. And more practically, on other occasions where communication with a network has been reliant on one person, it is fragile. Lines of communication break impacting on how well information flows.

Compare and contrast

- Children and Young Peoples and Community Sports networks. POP 'runs' both of these networks. The Children and Young Peoples network members are largely paid workers, and the Community Sports network members are mostly volunteers with day jobs and already overcommitted. In both networks there is a lack of time capacity to take a lead in developing the network.
- Heritage network. This network formed as a consultation body on development of The Box and then put down. A POP trustee re-established it because the community wanted it and it has functioned as a real support for members during the pandemic.
- Trauma informed network. POP indirectly supports this network of largely paid workers. Three individuals have set time aside from within their day jobs to lead and develop this network and is possibly one of the quickest growing, most successful networks. They have succeeded in gaining strategic level buy in and Plymouth became a Trauma Informed City as a result.

- Context, timing, and the starting point matters.

Plymouth Community and Neighbourhood Network

The most recent, biggest, and explicit network POP has led on developing was the Plymouth Community and Neighbourhood Network. To start the focus was to connect hyper local groups and after a year of developing a brand and terms of reference the launch saw over 80 people attend. Engagement was good from a core group throughout this time. From there growth in the network was slow and membership was about 50% statutory and very large organisations. Continuity in POP was lost when the key member of staff left, so whilst the network meetings were held in different areas across Plymouth it became very difficult to ignite interest.

Then the pandemic struck and Neighbourhood Care Networks were established with exactly the same vision. This time the focus was solely on local groups, on coming together around a specific crisis and there has been a greater level of success.

POPs role in supporting networks has changed. Since 2018 POP has held several different relationships with networks simultaneously:

- A funder.

- Being 'accountable' to networks and using members in decision making (Network of Networks).
- Being legally accountable to POP members as a loose network around POP.
- As a peer e.g., within Food Plymouth and the Plymouth Social Enterprise Network.
- As a facilitator and capacity builder e.g., the Refugee and Asylum Seekers and the Children and Young Person's networks.

Some confusion can be seen in the relationship between POP and networks. For example, the Network of Networks, asked members to 'represent' their networks in the decision-making surrounding Year 1 grants and the Learning & Collaboration Fund. The membership of this decision-making body was not made from the legal members of POP, nor trustees. Not all networks in Plymouth were invited raising questions of why some networks and not others.

This confusion led to a confused rhetoric about what POP's role was regarding networks. Sometimes we 'ran' them, sometimes we gave money, other times we simply supported from afar.

Networks take time and effort to build, which at times has been underestimated. POP operates on about 6.3 FTE team members (including Associates), which naturally limits the breadth and reach of the organisation. Staff turnover, clarity of POP's role, digital platforms, contact management and the team's own skills and behaviours all impact, positively and negatively, on how effective we can be.

But our different roles can effectively work together.

A Plymouth BAME Network.

Our approach to date has been to resource and strengthen grassroots BAME organisations, facilitate the development of a network, and encourage collaboration around joint funding applications to address issues faced by BAME communities. POP has brokered conversations and relationships between the City Council and members of the sector about a lack of BAME infrastructure and the impact of this on the city and communities.

POP is playing a role of convener and broker to move this agenda forward and is working with a couple of BAME led organisations to hold an open discussion meeting.

4.4 RESOLUTIONS AND MOVING FORWARDS

Building on the logic from the introduction:

- The biggest issues, environmentally and socially, are complex.
- No one actor or set of actors can create the change we need.
- Networks and collaboration at a citizen and organisational level, and the behaviours required to enable them to be effective, are most likely to allow the changes to emerge.

We would now add:

- **To build networks there' needs to be a wide foundation of general connections (Reach)**
- **There needs to be open spaces for anyone to be able to walk into**
- **There needs to be effective support and capacity building for network development.**

POPs focus is to:

- Continue to expand the organisation's reach via increasing membership and better use of internal data aided by the appointment of a new post, Core Lead, with the responsibility to improve POPs data and use of data.
- Continue to hold open spaces for the sector and others to come together.
- Continue to grow the neighbourhood networks.
- Bring a new focus on diverse voices and invest greater capacity in supporting those struggling to have their voice heard.
- Bring together network leaders in a Network Facilitators Forum.
- Create new capacity building offer around network skills and development.

And next? Once implemented POP will start to take networks to the next level of connectivity utilising digital technology – as has been successfully tested through the Neighbourhood Care Networks.

5 COLLABORATION

5.1 WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

We have pursued collaboration at three levels:

- Regional and city wide – representation and co-design
- Within our work
- Cultivating collaboration within the sector

5.1.1 Regional and city wide – representation and co-design

More effective and equal partnership working between voluntary, public, and private sectors to achieve change in the city was identified from the start as an important outcome for POP's work. And we have seen good progress on many fronts:

Representation – We have seen a significant change over the years as the role of the VCSE has been much more readily recognised. POP now sits as a representative on Safer Plymouth, the Health & Wellbeing Board, Local Care Partnership Delivery Board, Together for Children, Children's Safeguarding Board, and Inclusive Growth. Often sitting alongside a representative of larger charitable or social enterprises such as Improving Lives or St Luke's Hospice, POP is able to exert influence around the recognition for smaller groups and organisations.

Co-ordinated responses – POP leads on behalf of Devon on the VCS Emergencies Partnership, a mechanism led by the British Red Cross, NAVCA and local infrastructure bodies across the UK to link charities and local groups to emergency responses.

Shared learning across the region – On behalf of and with POP, the New Economics Foundation aims to build a collaboration to share learning about different approaches to funding with DBI, Plymouth Hope, Plymouth Funders Forum, RIO, Nudge Community Builders, PSEN, Torbay Community Development Trust, Devon Community Foundation. This links to the recognition that data and intelligence on the sector is vital for POP to successfully represent the sector at a strategic level. This has proved extremely important over the pandemic as quick feedback on community responses has been an important part of the crisis response.

Cross-sector initiatives – Unify Plymouth is a collaboration between POP, Plymouth City Council, Transforming Plymouth Together, Diversity Business Incubator, Plymouth Hope and Argyle Football Trust. The focus of this collaboration is on improving social cohesion within four neighbourhoods in the city.

Collaborative efforts towards system change – POP's most significant collaborative project, Social Investment Market Place Links (SIMPL), is with Plymouth Social Enterprise Network, Torbay Community Development Trust, Local Spark Torbay, Colab Exeter, Essence. (see below for more details).

Harnessing technology – Finally, the POP CEO sits on the Board of Our Plymouth CIC and through Our Plymouth works across the city to develop the necessary capacity, skills and learning about the potential for a digital platform for Plymouth.

5.1.2 Within our work

Every part of POPs delivery includes external partners as part of the core team. For example, through POP Ideas we work with Iridescent Ideas and Drift Advice. With Street-to-Scale: we work with Ratio, a national organisation of social scientists. We are working with the Social Change Agency, a national organisation with whom we contract their Accountability support service. We are part of the Positive People collaboration, a programme that support people back into work. It is led by Pluss Seetec and the partners are Cosmic, Torbay Community Development Trust and Devon Community Foundation.

5.1.3 Cultivating collaboration in the sector

We cultivate collaboration through all our work: capacity building, connections, supporting effective networks and funding, which has been increasingly focused on collaboration. POP has used the EFF investment to fund over 40 collaborative projects in Plymouth.

We also support deeper understanding via the work of the Learning Champion role. Through the relationships we hold, we are learning about what it takes to collaborate. By having explicit conversations with the funded collaborations, we raise into consciousness the lessons needed to strengthen the collaboration. The following observations have been gathered through conversation with active collaborations/collectives.

- Communication is the single biggest area of reflection.
 - Too much communication and partners become a burden, too little leads to lost connections. Emails can add to a sense of feeling overwhelmed as can 50 WhatsApp messages in 20 minutes!
 - And sometimes digital will never suffice, sometimes only face to face will build trust.
 - Sharing information and ideas. Often, we do not know where and to whom new information or ideas need to go to create inspiration or a spark.
- Inclusion. A lack of fresh input and fixed boundaries to a collaboration can limit new connections and ideas.
- Open physical spaces. 'Bumping' zones can fuel organic connections.
- Focus. The 'sky is the limit' can be overwhelming. How can the focus be kept on action whilst aspirations lead the way?

Over time, we will generate further insight into collaboration in funded projects.

5.2 CROWNING ACHIEVEMENTS

5.2.1 Establishing POPs role in the city

POPs role in the city has continued to steadily grow in recognition, particularly within the City Council. POP is regularly approached to lead on work that brings the sector together. For example, we are working with the City Council youth service (and youth organisations Barefoot, Fotonow and Greenbank & Mutley Community Trust) on a survey to inform future developments for young people in the city. At the start of the pandemic POP also led on a sector survey for the City Council that informed

the City Councils grant making (through discretionary business rates) and vastly improved our intelligence about the impact on sector. POP was granted £20k funding from Devon Together (Devon's Sustainable Transformation Partnership) to develop an approach to sector engagement and volunteering. POP decided to use the funds to fund Our Plymouth to produce a volunteer portal – this has gone on to become the recruitment mechanism for the whole of Devon for vaccination volunteers. The remaining funds were used to establish the Neighbourhood Care Networks.

Highstreet Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ)

Based on our connections, engagement and reach into the community, Plymouth City Council approached POP, together with the Box (Plymouth's new museum, art gallery and cultural centre) to lead on the community engagement programme for the Highstreet Heritage Action Zone.

The work will create an infrastructure that supports communities to learn about the city centre's Plan for Plymouth and the wonderful buildings and squares that adorn the city centre and to support those communities to then design and develop their own responses to public realm spaces inspired by their learning. Running alongside we will connect communities to a consultation about the future uses of this extraordinary space.

POP is working with members of the Heritage Network to deliver the programme that seeks to make culture visible and accessible within the city centre. It will work with communities and partners to animate spaces and places through a process of co-design and co-commissioning.

5.2.2 Leading co-design processes – steps towards system change

SIMPL is showing the potential to become a transformational regional partnership. Originally focussed on creating better conditions for social investment, SIMPL it is now taking a broad perspective championing a co-design approach to tackling the complex issues society faces.

POP led on the original funding bid for SIMPL, achieving £60k of funds for the social enterprise networks as part of this collaboration. This work has developed a highly aligned collaborative team that has since gone on to organise and host Regenerate Devon, a three-day event with over 600 people in attendance to discuss how to build a socially, ecologically resilient economy.

The SIMPL project was a one-year, action-research project funded through the Barrow Cadbury Trust's Connect Fund. It aimed to 'move the dial on social investment' across the footprint of three VCSE infrastructure organisations; POP in Plymouth, CoLab in Exeter, and Torbay Community Development Trust (TCDT) in Torbay. From year one onward, the SIMPL collaboration steadily increased its membership. All the social enterprise networks; Plymouth Social Enterprise Network, Essence in Exeter and Local Spark in Torbay were involved directly in delivery of work and now form the core membership.

The project identified significant momentum and demand for social investment in Devon and weaknesses in the support infrastructure. Poor public sector commissioning practice was identified as being in the top five barriers to sustainability. Although hard to engage in the debate about social investment, commissioners proved more responsive when approaches focused on their delivery priorities. Nationally, the debate widened to consider how to fund in a complex/collaborative environment and the need to build greater understanding between stakeholders, social investors, providers & commissioners. Drawing on this learning - and the exploration of design thinking as a powerful tool to unlock hidden solutions within complex situations through participatory, collaborative processes (see figure below) - the partnership is now leading on three variants of a co-design process.

This work then informed a successful bid to The National Lottery Community Fund's Healthy Communities Together, through which POP is leading the development of a movement around social connectedness and social isolation with PCC, Devon CCG, UHP, Livewell and the wider VCSE.

COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP LED TO SUCCESSFUL HEALTHY COMMUNITIES TOGETHER BID

Based on previous relationships and conversations since May 2019, POP had been convening conversations around citizen action and engagement. Intermittently working with The Alternative (national interest group) and RIO, POP brought together a group of 25-30 organisations to explore what it might take to increase community action in Plymouth. This led to a positive meeting with the Director of Public Health at the City Council.

- This then led to a call-to-action being sent to the City Council via the Strategic Director of People and the Director of Public Health. Raising the awareness of POP's work was timely as discussion around additional funding from health (Fair Shares) was already underway.
- This Fair Shares conversation carried out within the Local Care Partnership led to four priorities being agreed, one of which included community/social connectedness.
- In February 2020, the Healthy Communities Fund launched with its focus on the partnership between VCSE & health. With such a (strategic) commitment being made – and publicly - about social connectedness, it made sense to combine the two conversations already taking place in Plymouth around citizen action and, secondly, 'health' in the city to make the most of the opportunity for funding such a project.
- We believe the collaborative engagement between organisations of all shapes and sizes which we demonstrated to The National Lottery Community Fund was critical to us succeeding with the bid.
- Other critical factors included:
 - Experience and knowledge from the SIMPL project (mentioned above).
 - Plymouth's track record in conducting co-design processes.

5.2.3 Supporting collaborative bidding

POP is proud of its record in supporting a range of collaborative grant applications. For example:

POP facilitated a partnership bid to AB Charitable Trust to support vulnerable EU nationals living in the PL postcode area who must apply to remain in the UK after Brexit through the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). The lead applicant was Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council (PDREC), supported by the University of Plymouth's Law Clinic.

POP facilitated a partnership bid to the Postcode Lottery Dream Fund. Together with Food Plymouth leading, a bid document and a video were produced in just 2 weeks. POP negotiated the Theatre Royal Plymouth as the lead organisation and brought in diversity via Diversity Business Incubator and the Plymouth Complex Lives Alliance.

We have found that organisations are wary of the resource implications of putting together partnership bids but that using an independent bid facilitator encourages organisations to participate.

Well-managed, partnership bid opportunities are acknowledged mechanisms for building trust and collaboration in the city. Because of POP's increasing reputation as an 'honest broker' our involvement can help to improve circumstances for a 'partnership bid' in cases with a tricky start, such as with Unify Plymouth.

In 2019 Plymouth City Council approached POP to lead the Unify Plymouth project alongside the Refugee and Asylum Seekers Network. Unfortunately, the City Council changed the conditions and started to introduce competition by requesting 2 other organisations to 'bid' into the project – Argyle Football Trust and Transforming Plymouth Together. POP was aware that this new situation risked splitting relationships and breaking trust.

POP used our role as an honest broker to bring the conversations out into the open and work collaboratively on a joint programme. Working with all the partners we facilitated conversations and agreement for the collaborative approach.

Furthermore, the relationships formed in this process prompted further collaborative work in response to the pandemic. For example:

'Swapping Cream Teas and Cricket for Footie and Fried Rice' was a joint endeavour between Diversity Business Incubator, Plymouth Hope, Argyle Football Trust and Transforming Plymouth Together. Nigerian meal kits were given to 25, mainly white, British families with all the ingredients needed to make Nigerian Fried Rice, a recipe card and a magazine about Nigeria's national sport, football. The families were also given a link to a video made by two Nigerian women living in Plymouth about their lives: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhuCdWK7CqA>

In return, 25 migrant families received hampers containing the ingredients to make a traditional Devon Cream Tea, along with a recipe card, a guide to cricket and a cricket set.

5.3 CHALLENGES, HURDLES, AND REFLECTIONS

Learning about collaboration is a well-trodden path, but POP would like to reiterate some of the lessons learnt and then proceed, offering a focus for the way forward.

5.3.1 Relationships, shared purpose and time

From direct experience and working with the funded projects there are several critical aspects that need to be fulfilled for an effective partnership:

- Taking time and having the patience to build relationships. before and during collaboration and recognising the challenges that smaller organisations face in finding the funding/capacity to allow this time.
- Building a shared purpose is critical. It fuels positive direction and acts as a touchstone during the difficult times to remind members how all their individual missions are being served by the collaboration.

These create the necessary environment for trust to be built and the shared purpose to be honed over time. Once trust builds, members find it easier to share openly and start to deepen relationships and trust – the start of a virtuous cycle.

The other common challenge with joint working is about how power, control and decision making are exercised. At a practical level this requires:

- Clear roles and responsibilities.

- Governance arrangements that allow all members a voice and a role to play in decision making.

However, whatever the formal arrangements, personal dynamics can quickly destabilise a well-functioning collaboration. Personal relationships matter and need care and attention to evolve.

SIMPL – collaborative success can be a factor of contact time

At the start of the pandemic, the SIMPL collaboration experienced difficulties. Part of the collaboration had embarked on planning a positive and what was to be a highly successful event. Another member felt insufficient recognition had been given to the role of the collaboration. Under stress, tempers flared. But relationships were strong enough for everyone to step back and resolve the situation maturely and honestly, because enough time had been invested in building up trust through previous challenging circumstances and shared purpose building exercises.

It became clear that the pandemic had interrupted the pattern of regular meetings. Reinstating them fixed the problem simply by keeping communication flowing.

In our experience, it is often the 'simple' things that cause the largest issues for collaborations. And keeping a close eye on how people are interacting and whether or not relationships are working is crucial. Often the solution is not in the 'new' knowledge or learning that has been discovered; it is in 'doing' what we already know to be effective.

5.3.2 Funding

Funding can be a major source of relationship breakdown. The experience across many large and small examples is that closed funding processes can produce toxic competition, drastically reduces collaboration, and increases the chance of relationships being harmed.

For example.

POPs first-hand experience

Something happens when a new fund is launched. Any organisation that could potentially apply does a quick recce and decides whether it is worth applying. If this organisation is working in isolation, this approach works well. If, however this happens when they are working closely with other organisations or within a collaboration it can sow mistrust.

It can be difficult to know how to manage it.

- Do you email all the partners, knowing that the funding will not stretch across everyone and knowing that ultimately, you will be competing against each other?
- And if you share your intention to bid do you put your organisation at a disadvantage if your partners do not equally share (their intentions?)?
- If you are on the receiving end of a subset of partners collaborating but not including your organisation in open communications, this leaves a significant feeling of being left out. This undermines the sense of collective endeavour between the partners.

5.4 RESOLUTIONS AND MOVING FORWARDS

Building on the logic presented in the introduction:

- The biggest issues, environmentally and socially, are complex.
- No one actor or set of actors can create the change we need.
- Networks and collaboration at a citizen and organisational level, and the behaviours required to enable them to be effective, are most likely to allow the changes to emerge.

We would now add:

- **Collaboration emerges out of existing relationships and networks in response to a shared purpose or campaign and/or an opportunity to work together.**
- **Successful collaboration requires careful support and nurturing in a funding environment that supports this.**

In addition to embedding collaboration in all our work, going forward we will:

Champion the power of the collective: In recognition that the predominant culture is still very much focussed around 'I', and the need to move to a culture of 'we', part of POPs focus in the future is to continue to amplify positive narratives of collective work promote stories of collective, rather than individual, success.

Show leadership and build skills: POP will also continue to take a leadership role, promoting and modelling collaborative behaviours whilst developing collaborative skills and capacities in others.

Work towards a 'collaboration-friendly' funding model: POP will continue to use the EFF investment to encourage funders to investigate and understand the impact of

the current funding environment with the aim to stimulate an ecosystem of funding offers.

Reinforce and grow grassroots influence City wide: Finally, POP will continue to build its role at a city level, using its data and intelligence alongside other data sets to amplify the work of grassroots organisations in Plymouth. Supporting this will be the work the New Economics Foundation is leading on with POP.

Tackle the big issues through co-design: co-design offers a route through which the voice and the people can take the lead, and stakeholders can gather around and respond. POP will continue to develop our practice around co-design using it to build understanding from the grassroots and citizens outwards into community action, collaboration and service re-design using funding, commissioning, and social investment to fuel it.

6 STRENGTHENING SKILLS AND CAPACITY

6.1 WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

In 2014 Zebra Collective won the continuation of the POP contract from Plymouth City Council and the Funding Advice Service contract through an open tender process. The Funding Advice Service (called Sustainable Routes) was transferred from Routeways Centre Ltd to Zebra Collective along with one member of staff that moved across. The Funding Advice Service became POP ideas in October 2014.

This is the most tangible part of POPs operation.

Without the necessary skills, experience and support, the organisational members of the sector and networks would be weaker, which is why funding and business support is still needed.

"We didn't have a clue what we needed to do or how to go about it. Things like how to start a business; setting up a bank account and what kind of organisation we should be. POP has been brilliant. The help we've had has made a massive difference: they really are there for you and are committed to helping you get stuff off the ground and making a success of things."

We've been taking part in the POP coffee mornings on zoom, and it's been brilliant to meet so many different people from different organisations and see what they are doing. Plymouth is a really great place for community groups."

Emma, Mindful Art Club

Since April 2018, the capacity building service (POP ideas) has helped to secure £2.5 million in grant funding for Plymouth community groups and organisations. This has been through providing 1:1 support, delivering training workshops on, for example, 'how to write a funding application' and 'evidencing your impact' and 'pitching to funders with confidence'. In addition, hosting two 'Pitch Your Project' events during which members were able to put their project proposal to a panel of 13 local and national funders. Satisfaction is high (results from 2018/19):

- **93%** of respondents said that the service was 'excellent' or 'good' which is the same as the previous year.
- **96%** of respondents rated one-to-one advice as excellent or good.
- **93%** said the Plymouth Fundraising network was excellent or good.
- **89%** said the training workshops were excellent or good.

Impact

The services are making a positive difference to groups and organisations. As a result of POP ideas:

- **88%** felt they were better informed.

- **75%** felt more confident about applying for funding.
- **69%** felt their skills have improved.
- **63%** felt they had stronger foundations for their work (e.g.: a constitution or legal structure in place)
- **73%** felt they were better at proving the difference they make.
- **62%** of respondents felt they were delivering a more effective service for their clients.

Our use of digital technology and wrap around support is positively impacting on the sectors use of digital technology. We have trained 48 people in the use of Slack and Open Collective and over 60 people in using Zoom. These numbers do not include the one-to-one support given through our Comms and Digital Support role.

The POP capacity building offer is a balance between offering core support and adapting to the changing needs of the sector. In response to feedback and development, new offers and changes over the last few years have included:

- Ideas into Action training – group peer learning for people interested in starting a community project.
- Digital 'Play and learn' sessions during the pandemic to encourage peer learning and knowledge sharing.
- Network leadership training for network facilitators to learn from each other and external input.
- Pitch Your Project events increased focus by selecting themes e.g., children and young people.
- Tested different subjects for workshops. Some have been popular like 'volunteer management' or 'social marketing' whilst others have not been popular, such as 'financial management' even though we know this is a need through our 1:1 support work.

6.2 CROWNING ACHIEVEMENTS



Pitch Your Project May 2019:

The first 'pitch' event, organised by Plymouth Octopus Project (POP+), was held in 2015. Since then more than £1.6m has been invested in twenty-two Plymouth-based initiatives. Almost all are 'grass-roots' projects working in, and with, local communities supporting some of the most vulnerable people in the city.

- 17 people / organisations pitched in 2019
- £110k was secured in grant funding
- 13 funders attended the event, including Tudor Trust, Devon Community Foundation, Children in Need

Pitch Your Project

POP has been leading on building relationships between projects and organisation in Plymouth and funders for years. In 2018, we launched Pitch Your Project, and repeated in 2019. It is a mechanism that allows the individuals working with local projects the opportunity to promote and talk about their projects with a panel of 13 local and national funders.

Promoting peer learning

Peer support through knowledge transfer and confidence building is a natural benefit of network development. During the pandemic POP has seen this continue. Via the Neighbourhood Care Networks, POP has hosted a meeting between the main contacts for each network – the Torchbearers. At the same time, Slack, a digital collaborative platform has allowed 'offline' sharing to continue.

These two mechanisms have supported people to explore each other's journeys, ask advice from each other.

6.3 CHALLENGES, HURDLES, AND REFLECTIONS

The most significant challenges that we face in strengthening skills and capacity within the sector concern both the 'offer' and selecting the best method of delivery.

6.3.1 Getting the offer right

Organisations within the sector do not always know what they want or need. At other times organisations may request specific training, there is little (or no) take up of the training once it has been organised.

There are two training workshops that are most popular: writing funding applications and social impact. This is indicative of what drives organisations to seek support: accessing and securing funding. This is also supported by the fact that the most requested topic for support for one-to-one advice is 'funding'.

The extend of the support we can provide is affected by the similarity of training sessions delivered by other organisations in the city which are equally helpful and appropriate to members.

6.3.2 Method of delivery

There are several delivery options open to POP:

- Face to face
- Online
- Peer learning

POP had already decided to move some delivery online, such as, the legal structure workshops which had been converted into a webinar format. Over the last year, the pandemic has speeded up this move to online delivery. At the same time, it has increased the opportunities for peer learning – shown by the volume of organisations reached quickly through the Tech Training sessions which we began to deliver at the start of the pandemic.

Peer learning is a form of learning that maybe suited to a networked based model of delivery and is worth exploration as POP develops into the future.

Historically POP and POP ideas were two separate contracts and may have resulted in a degree of separation between the areas of work. POP ideas have a strong brand and good reputation in the sector and is an effective way of building positive relationships between POP and its members.

The focus for the last few years has been to close the gap between the identities and branding – the POP ideas website has been moved into the main POP website and plans are underway to do the same for the social media accounts.

6.4 RESOLUTIONS AND MOVING FORWARDS

Building on the logic from the introduction:

- The biggest issues, environmentally and social are complex.
- No one actor or set of actors can create the change we need.
- Networks and collaboration at a citizen and organisational level, and the behaviours required to be effective are most likely to allow the changes to emerge.

We would now add:

- **Strong networks and collaborations require strong members.**
- **Capacity building through advice and training is necessary to achieve this.**
- **Capacity building can build effective relationships and feed the growth of networks.**

Over the next year POP will focus on:

- **Introducing new training opportunities and improving skills for networks and collaboration.**
- **Explore peer learning approaches.**
- **Continue to develop the online offer.**
- **Working with others to make it easier for organisations to access training from many sources.**

7 FUNDING

7.1 WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

In 2017 EFF invested £1.3m into Plymouth. At the end of that year the focus was on preparing and setting up with work really getting underway in 2018. POP wanted to act quickly and, in doing so, provide the sector with a return on the amount of time and energy it had so willingly invested in the EFF process. The grant application-based process used a funding panel called the Network of Networks to make decisions. This panel consisted of members from the different networks. It was this newly established group of individuals that (after significant training and subsequent assessment and discussion) decided on which projects/applications were successful. Through the process up to £10,000 was available under 2 elements:

- Making it Happen: grants for projects that “make a change happen”.
- Working Together: grants focussing on building the networks that “enable everyone to feed their ideas in”

Decisions were carried out over 3 days and roughly £120k was deployed.

- 7 grants went to networks.
- 16 grants went to projects.

An evaluation report was commissioned, which praised the process for its rigour and participation in decision making but advised the aims of the funding were revisited before the next round of funding was deployed. These aims are captured in the table below.

What is it not	What it is
It is not a small grants programme	It is money to effect long term change
It is not a commissioning programme	It is a way to begin using participatory and democratic decision-making processes in the VCS sector
It is not money to be paid to individual organisations.	It is to help the change to collaboration and collective decisions on what is best for the city.
It is not to fund existing projects that need grant funding (unless they have a clear place in a collaboration)	It is to break barriers, to allow innovation and risk, and to encourage participation.
It is not to take over work statutory organisations do.	It is for use in partnership with statutory and private sector organisations on projects that effect change in the city.
It is not enough money to fund major changes alone	It is to leverage in other contributions to meeting the objectives above.
It is not to routinely fund networks simply for existing.	It is to build a VCS sector where all contribute to agreed directions, and key people are rewarded.
It is not to support competitive working	It is to build a sector where resources are shared and fully utilised.

At the beginning of 2019, the Network of Networks, POP team and Trustees reviewed and agreed a simplification of the purpose of the funding, focusing it on clear strategic priorities for the sector and the larger change aspirations inherent in the

fund. This strategic evolution was based on the deep discussion that took place during the initial EFF process and continuing engagement and feedback during the initial funding round. The renewed purpose focussed attention through three funds:

- Community Fund – responding to the pressing need for grassroots activity to be resourced and funded.
- Learning and Collaboration Fund – bringing an explicit focus on collaboration in our funding of VCS organisations.
- Challenge Fund – reflecting the strongly-held desire to create transformation in Plymouth.

However, at about the same time the City Council significantly reduced its funding of POP which, in turn, affected the amount of funding available for POP to dispense.

Aware of the need for continuous evaluation; supported learning and of maintaining contact with the successful projects and organisations POP sought to find out – through a participatory process with POP members and ‘experts’ in Plymouth - how it might manage this. Subsequently, a ‘Learning Champion’ was appointed to work alongside POP-funded projects, build relationships and promote reflection and learning.

New opportunities and relationships with Ratio, a national organisation of social scientists led to The Community Fund evolving into “Street-to-Scale”. The S2S fund was open to any adult and young people over the age of 16, giving them the unique opportunity and financial ability to bring about change in their communities. The basic ‘rules’ being that any 6 citizens can open a ‘bank’ and use £1,000 to do something that would benefit their community. Within the ‘bank’ funds are spent equitably and transparently, building trust between funder to the citizens and between the ‘bank’ members.

The Learning and Collaboration Fund brought with it a more explicit focus on collaboration between organisations reducing ‘project content’ to second place in the decision-making process. . A panel drawn from the Network of Networks and POP Trustees made the decisions. Any group of organisations could apply for up to £5,000 and funding was deployed over 2 rounds, 2 months apart. £40,000 was deployed (£20k in 2020).

In October 2019, a participative decision-making process was run with the Network of Networks to decide how funding would be deployed. Street-to-Scale and the Learning & Collaboration Fund were prioritised over any spend on the Challenge Fund.

Covid-19 called for a more radical shift during 2020 and required a rapid adaptation of POP activities. A third round of Learning and Collaboration was postponed and later cancelled. The decision to postpone meant that capacity was available to respond to the pandemic. Nationally and locally, other funders recognised this and were also quick to provide a ‘flexible’ response to funding projects which reduced anxieties about how the various responses to Covid19 might be paid for. Crucially this meant that time and effort were focussed on starting Neighbourhood Care

Networks to provide a hyper local infrastructure for city wide efforts to 'plug' into and through which neighbourhoods could convey critical information to each other (as well as POP and other interested parties) and call out for the things which they might need to better enable them to support their communities.

Once greater capacity became available, using some of the crisis funding from EFF and the £10k discretionary business support grant from the City Council, a participative decision-making process was run to define the use of the £30k. This resulted in two additional funds being quickly set up:

- £250 a POP – a very easy to access fund open to any member to support additional expenses caused by the pandemic.
- POP Collectives – where eligibility depends on applicants working together to design and carry out their project together. The assessment stage was designed so that – before final consideration - other POP members would offer advice on the proposal and, in doing so, improve the shape of the project; evolve it and encourage a degree of learning & reflection among those taking part. POP members receive and rate all the submissions, which are also publicised on the POP website. Up to £3,000 is available.

POP also increased its efforts to support the heavy reliance on digital technology. We:

- Worked with the Social Change Agency (SCA) and their Accountable service. Primarily designed for groups with no bank account to manage their incomings and outgoings easily and transparently, Accountable gives the safety and transparency of a formal bank account, without the need to legally register as a business or charity. Groups hold their funds in the SCA business bank account, and use the accompanying platform, Open Collective to clearly see and control what is coming in and out. We used this for £250 a POP and POP Collectives so the spend of these funds is completely transparent.
- Required the use of Slack for all POP Collectives bids that are funded to fulfil several purposes:
 - Encourage open communication between partners organisations.
 - Allow the POP Learning Champion to follow progress and encourage reflection.
 - Allow POP to identify opportunities for connection and new relationships.

7.2 CROWNING ACHIEVEMENTS

7.2.1 Not taking the easy path

POP is serious in its intention to achieve transformative change through collaboration AND in engaging and valuing the talents of all:

"It is arguable that the EFF investment should go to building capacity within POP to 'manage' the transformation. But POP choses to walk a sensitive path. Going together takes much more time but POP is not prepared to ignore the existing mindsets and actions of an older established VCS or the urgent need to support new people and new ways of doing things. It wants to create space for both streams to work

together and understand each other. This is hard but necessary if we are to build a genuinely collaborative system that is sustainable through the power of its relationships and connections."

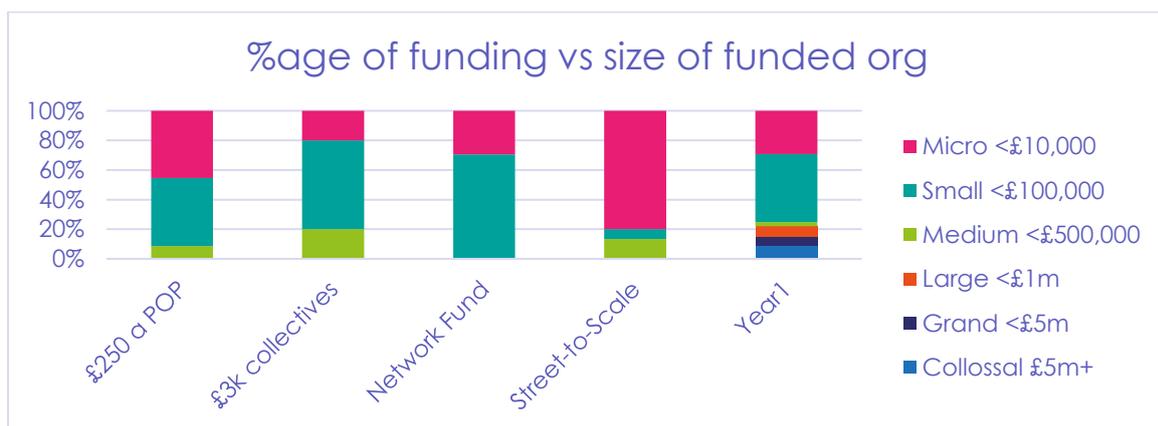
(POP trustee)

Testing radically new approaches such as Street-to-Scale or open, participative, and collaborative based funding processes is hard work and requires imagination. It can be a 'messy' process that needs a gentle, humble, and firm approach to managing expectations, communications, and delivery.

Our activity as a funder is still very much a work in progress but EFF funding has brought POP to the place where we want to really test how other funders can join with us and build a new culture of collaboration in the sector.

7.2.2 Reaching further down into small organisations

While the overall amount of funding given out through the EFF investment has diminished, POP is proud to report that – in line with our overarching commitments – the amount that has been awarded to micro and smaller organisations has increased significantly.



Street-to-Scale has been game changing in enabling POP to reach out and provide accessible funding to those outside of the traditional funding system.

We are collecting evidence around Street to Scale through a story-telling process, well suited to the diversity of the work supported and the collaborative nature of the fund. We will be able to reflect more fully on what has been achieved and learnt once this process is complete. We are excited by the responses and experiences of the people involved in Street to Scale and its excellent reach to younger people, which has often allowed them to make a difference, and bring about positive change, in their communities for the first time.

7.2.2.1 It contributed to young people's confidence.

Set up in 2014 in Ennesettle by the charity Barefoot, the Diversity Project was created as a way of tackling racism by introducing young people to some of the many 'different' cultures and religions in Plymouth. It was a huge success and in November 2019, a third Diversity Project began in November 2019 in nearby Whitleigh, at the request of a group of 13- and 14-year-olds who, having seen what had happened in Ennesettle, wanted their own 'diverse' experience. The group decided to apply for the S2S fund to extend the original project with a visit to (multicultural) London and an inner-city youth club.

Unlike traditional funding applications which are often quite onerous, S2S is straight-forward. One of the youth group, fourteen-year-old Courtney Smalley, wrote the expression of interest, and was thrilled to hear that her application had been successful, and they would receive the money.

Hosted by the council-run youth club, Bollo Brook, in inner-city Acton – home to a lot of gang activity - the group of eight young people from Whitleigh were able to experience one of the most diverse cities in the world. The positive impact of the project continued.

Fourteen-year old, Kiera Chown, says it's made her a better person;

"I've become a nicer person to the religious people," she says. "I do not judge them anymore because I learnt about them and their beliefs and how they live."

The Diversity Project brought together these organisations: POP, Barefoot, Plymouth Piety Mosque, The Plymouth Synagogue, START and Cultural Kitchen; Jabo Butera at DBI; Plymouth & District Equality Council; Jonathan Marshall MBE from the Plymouth Centre for Faith & Diversity; Four Greens Wellbeing Hub and Cllr Jonathan Taylor.

7.2.3 Promoting collaboration and connection

The nature of collaboration within the projects has varied across the years but remains strong. In the first year an average of seven organisations were named in the applications, compared to five within the Learning & Collaboration projects and four within POP Collectives. Considering the significantly smaller grants made in the revised programmes, this is a great success. Again, there is more to learn from the funded projects to shape future work on collaboration, but we are seeing high levels of energy and a genuine sense of organisations supporting each other and playing to their strengths around things that matter to them and their communities:

Learning & Collaboration Fund projects

The Big Fix was held in February by the collective Repair, Make and Mend which knits together Borrow Don't Buy, Timebank, Scrapstore and Makers HQ. More than fifty people brought along their broken, chipped, and damaged items and while some were beyond repair others weren't: a vintage doll, a Goblin Teasmade and a couple of cine cameras were just some of the weird and wonderful items saved-from-scrap. The Big Fix saved approximately £300 in money; 5.6kg in waste-to-landfill and about 50.3kg of CO2 emissions.

Culture and Integration Through Food threw open its (oven) doors, opening as Jabulani, at The Plot on Union Street, to thrill us all with global food cuisine. Diversity Business Incubator has joined food-forces with Food Plymouth and Miriam & Miriam to tempt us with delicacies from around the world, bringing us closer together at home.

Creative Natures is reaching out to young people living in hostels and using art, gardening, and plants to encourage growth. Horticultural Therapy Trust and Free Radical Creations have formed a partnership to nurture positive relationships between those taking part in the project and the natural world.

The Eclectic Network can be found doing all sorts of creative things in the community space - Leadworks Factory CIC in Stonehouse. The Learning & Collaboration Fund from POP+ helped to turn a wonderful old warehouse in Rendle Street into a public space. It is a diverse and creative collective of groups and individuals made up of The Kintsugi Project; Flyinghead Studios; Community Arts; Cawfee Community Café; Pride in Plymouth; Empowering Hidden Voices; Imperfect Cinema & Mothership Audio.

Peer advice is hard wired into the POP Collectives and has helped to stimulate even more collaboration across the sector.

"Working together and having the opportunity to evolve the application is leading to a much stronger project compared to a standard application form followed by a 'yes/no' system...it does frontload a significant amount of the development (hopefully resulting in a more impactful project)"

POP Collective feedback

"The Forum was delighted to receive support and help from the POP panel. It was a helpful, fulfilling experience to discuss the funding bid with a panel whose main agenda was to offer support and practical help. All Forum members have a wide range of experiences regarding funding applications and the greatly differing ways in which applications are handled and the support available. Often the only support is written guidelines; I personally find some funders not keen to discuss projects in any sort of detail, referring to the guidelines and this is normally fine if your project fits in the box but can be an issue if you

are looking for funding for a project that is a little different from the criteria. It is often very difficult to transfer and communicate fully the passion that organisations have for a project in the set restrictive questions with a limitation on number of words written. The session gave us a lot to reflect on and we will be grateful for ongoing support. Thank you to all who took the time and trouble to attend our feedback session."

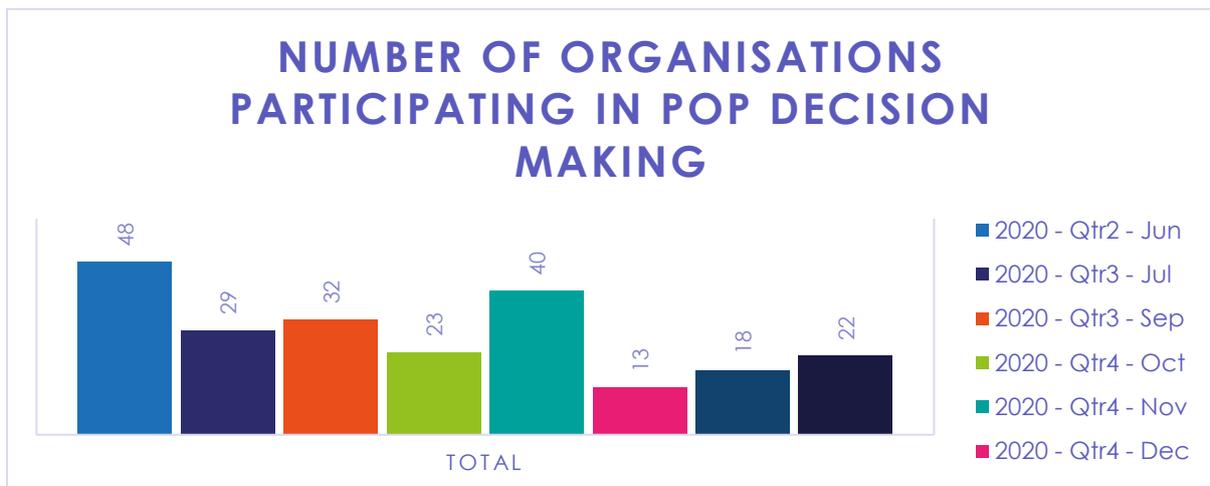
POP Collective resubmission

7.2.4 Increased participation in decision making.

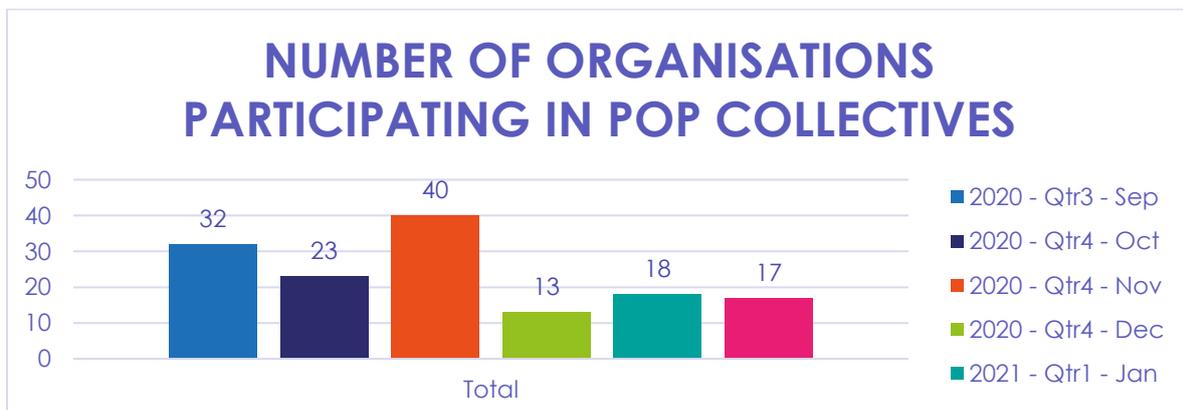
The EFF funding has greatly helped to test participative decision making. Initially trialled with the Network of Networks, there then followed a discussion around how to best evaluate it which then led to POP members being participants in the following processes:

- How POP should manage the funder relationship and subsequent learning
- The panel regarding the Learning & Collaboration Fund
- How to use £30k
- Participation in the POP Collectives process

106 organisations have taken part in decisions about funding over the last 12 months.



Of the 106, 77 have taken part in the POP Collectives process.



Research carried out by Newcastle Business School (Northumbria University) highlights positive feelings about the approach.

I think the good thing about POP is that it feels very human in the way that it's done – if you were asking money from a friend to do something other than applying for a loan in the bank.

NBS Research

7.2.5 National profile

We are proud of the attention we are getting at a national level. The National Lottery Community Fund requested information to inform its Growing Great Ideas fund. We are a case study within the new, upcoming Human Learning Systems report from the Newcastle Business School (Northumbria University) and the New Economics Foundation is supporting us to widen these conversations locally and nationally.

7.3 CHALLENGES, HURDLES, AND REFLECTIONS

It is important to acknowledge that £1.3m is an insignificant amount compared to the billion spend in the city aiming at achieving similar outcomes to that of the EFF investment. Paraphrasing, the question faced at the start of 2018, was “how can £1.3m be best used to achieve the three outcomes via a 21st century CVS?” What was the best leverage? How to use of a limited resource would always present a challenge. Should it be spent in large amounts, or small amounts? On what should it be spent? How should decisions be made?

It was responding to these challenges that resulted in the approaches POP was to take. Regarding the question of system change, POP has secured further funding to lead on co-design processes that have this as their goal. Had POP attempted to choose to tackle specific challenges and back this with the EFF investment without the learning gained over the last 3 years, it would have likely led to the same challenges faced as a funder (see below), but without the learning necessary to ensure success.

We strongly believe we need to learn how to fund individuals, networks, and collaborations as the first step on this journey.

POP is proud of the role we are taking as a funder. Our approach is geared towards ‘action’ yet, at the same time, being considerate to some of the critical questions funders face. All this, with a relatively small amount of funding.

We maintain that:

- Good decision-making (and innovation) requires diversity of input and perspective. How can decisions about funding maximise input, maintain quality through deliberation, and yet still make decisions about a finite resource?
- Power and control must remain flexible and be distributed as equally as possible to maintain dynamism.

- Accountability for spending the allocated funding needs to be held within the group, network, or collaboration. How do we exercise our funders' accountability?
- Learning and adaptation leads to greater impact and innovation. How can we best promote this?
- Funding can encourage an environment conducive to collaboration, trust and relationship building. How best can we support this?

Our role as a funder now has a clear focus. As well as funding amazing individuals, networks and collaborations in Plymouth, POP needs to take the challenge to other funders.

What would it look like if 50% of all funds deployed into Plymouth used an open, collaborative, peer advice process?

We can link the challenge directly back to the logic that lies behind everything POP does:

- The biggest issues, environmentally and social are complex.
- No one actor or set of actors can create the change we need.
- Networks and collaboration at a citizen and organisational level, and the behaviours required to be effective are most likely to allow the changes to emerge.

We would now add:

- **Traditional funding processes destroy, not build collaboration.**
- **The examples we have set, and the impacts we have had, when seen by other funders might lead to a greater change in how funding is used in Plymouth and further afield.**

We believe the impact will be transformational: a culture of collaboration will evolve across the city and our goal of social change will emerge.

- Collaborative behaviours will be valued over competitive behaviours.
- Competition will remain but it will be healthy and transparent. There will be fewer opportunities for backstabbing.
- Duplication will subside as projects will benefit from a wide and diverse range of advice and input.
- And generous leadership will emerge with individuals and organisations being happy to advise and help each other make the city even better.

And finally, and most importantly.

- The people we all seek to help will cease to be treated as commodities, owned by organisations, held onto so one organisation can show better impact than another.
- It will become a race to the ethical top, not the ethical bottom.

Practically, several challenges have faced POP as it has implemented the various funding processes. These are summarised below:

- How to balance the various 'hats' POP wears in Plymouth
- Influencing culture change
- How to balance the capacity of the organisation with the aspiration
- Proportionality between process and level of funding
- Some specific challenges around safeguarding
- Recent reliance on digital technology has caused challenges.

7.3.1 POPs role

Are POP's twin roles, that of 'champion' of the VCSE and 'funder' compatible and are they helping or hindering its role as a funder. Our experience – and evidence - suggests it is both positive and negative in effect. The funder role can:

- increases genuine and valued engagement in POPs wider work and therefore between organisations;
- build a quality of relationships otherwise unachievable without funds.
- but it can also raise expectations that cannot be met;
- and it is yet to be seen whether the role invites a greater level of criticism than might be experienced by a funder less connected into the sector.

7.3.2 Being open can be painful

One of POPs core values is 'openness & transparency' and we live by this. But it also makes us vulnerable as everything is 'on display'. Our mistakes are visible, and it can hurt to be criticised which, of course, can have a detrimental effect on morale and can make it hard to hold onto the confidence we have about what we are doing. So, we have really worked hard as individuals on being a 'team' and of developing an open learning culture so that we can better absorb criticisms and support each other as one.

7.3.3 Influencing culture change

But (something) happened in session one where it was a blank sheet, and I said, "Oh, you know, we could do all sorts of wacky and wild ways to do this." The people in the room said, "What's the form going to look like? What criteria should we have? What's the maximum we should set?" And we ended up with a two-page funding agreement, almost.

NBS Research

Every part of POPs work aims to move the current culture from a culture of competition into a culture of collaboration and sharing. The challenge that existing funding process pose to this has been discussed above. However, there are also shifts needed at the local level:

- The 'get it right first time' culture leaves little room for mistakes, errors, and learning.
- The existing predominant culture within the VCSE is still one that is highly competitive.

As we have seen in the paragraph above regarding transparency, it can be hard to remain confident; to hear the feedback and not the 'tone'. POP addresses this by not compromising on our values (such as the Unify Plymouth example above) and by building a resilient team that can manage the critical feedback.

At the same time, much confidence can be ascribed to having core funding. Without the constant push and pull of the funding application process we can set out our path and step forth.

7.3.4 Capacity, learning and aspirations

It has been a challenge to balance the need for internal capacity to manage the learning process and not to 'overspend' the EFF investment on POP's own capacity. And yet it is a matter of great pride that our current situation has evolved from testing, reflecting, learning, and actioning something innovative.

Through the implementation of our latest funding, POP Collectives, we can show how as a locally based agency we can relatively quickly develop a new approach (through participation). And to test and adapt as we go along.

During the implementation of Street-to-Scale the introduction of a new approach meant that there was a need to be consistent with the communication and our capacity to respond to inquiries. We reflected on this when we established POP Collectives.

The draft process was tested internally, revised, tested and revised about four times. with the cycle being pr. By this point most of the team had experienced at least one run through and key messages had been rehearsed before the process was launched. The Learning Champion then convened weekly review meetings, ensuring support was available for anyone wanting to apply (and particularly for the inevitable technical faults). This was set up as part of POP's offer of Tech Tuesdays training sessions with additional one-to-one support available. In response to feedback and internal experience we subsequently changed the requirement to use the technical platforms, Slack and Open Collective, prior to the award stage. A more structured review is underway.

Each additional requirement for testing, supporting, and reviewing requires the capacity necessary to manage this. POP is continually making judgements on how to achieve 'good enough' and to avoid under resourcing and overspending the EFF investment.

We can also show how we have constantly reflected on how well we are achieving our values such as valuing participation (see below).

- In year one the Network of Networks was responsible for the decision-making on £140k worth of funding.
- The same group supported the development of the funding approach in year two.
- The individuals involved then became the panel for the Learning and Collaboration Fund.
- A group of evaluation and creative experts advised on how POP should manage the funder relationship and learning.
- A new participatory decision-making process involved POP members to decide how to use £30k.
- Participation in the POP Collectives process is at two stages: advice stage and rating stage.

Some of the challenges faced are natural tensions that arise between:

- Maximising diverse views yet at the same time managing manage (the inevitable) conflict.
- Valuing specific expertise while maintaining consistency.
- Having deliberative conversations while maximising participation
- Having consistency but maintaining engagement

Currently POP Collectives achieves a balance of sorts:

- It increases diversity and participation through a rating stage that invites all members to rate funding submissions. A minimum of 25 organisations need to rate before the submission goes forward.
- Expertise is brought in through an advice stage that invites POP members to feedback and advise on submissions.
- Furthermore, the advice stage has been designed to strengthen existing relationships, encourage new ones and create collaboration.

However, we know it is weak on deliberation and we are currently seeking ways to address this.

7.3.5 Proportionality & equity of funding

It's a challenge. We are trying to stick to our values and principles while at the same time, aware of the burden we have placed on collaborations and the objectives we have set, wanting them to acquire the necessary funding so that they might achieve their goals.

We know it needs to be proportional. As things exist, funds will be deployed in line with the rate projected which suggests that we have got it right.

POP also needs to consider whether there is an issue of equity with more 'able' groups being better-placed and more-resourced to work collaboratively. We need to decide if this is an issue and, if so, address it.

7.3.6 Digital confidence and skills

For some the access, skills, and confidence to use IT has proved to be a barrier within the POP Collectives process.

I can see it is good to look at new ways of using I.T but for many people it can be quite a learning curve and is it appropriate for such a small amount of money; especially for organisations that have limited resources and staffing input. Many small organisations lack up to date I.T equipment and software.

POP Collective feedback

Having anticipated there was a need for 'tech training', we identified the necessary time and resources to support people through the process. The training sessions have been popular, well-attended and feedback has been extremely positive. However, it has not overcome all barriers, and is a wider issue than one affecting POP. Hence, we are working with partners across Plymouth to improve overall support for the sector.

7.4 RESOLUTIONS AND MOVING FORWARDS.

POP is confident in the role we are taking as a funder. Whilst it can present challenges the role also presents opportunities to explore how funding can be used in fundamentally different ways – ways that perhaps only an organisation like POP can exercise.

The priorities for our role as a funder are:

- To deploy the remaining funds to best effect and continue to develop our approach based on our values and on learning from our work.
- To seek further investment to improve the digital means by which the sector engages with the process; connect with others and allows other funders to 'see' projects and decide whether they too might allocate funding.
- To reach out and connect with other funders to discover how much our work might have greater influence.

8 RUNNING A NIMBLE ORGANISATION WITH STRATEGIC IMPACT

Over the last two years POP has been going through a relatively extensive internal improvement programme.

8.1.1 Digital, data & intelligence

We can now track all our engagement with our members through our use of Salesforce, a digital Customer Relationship Management system. Furthermore, it has been an important tool in showing a more holistic picture of POPs activity. This is vital for:

- Providing POP with a greater understanding and better intelligence which we can contribute into strategic conversations.
- Better targeting of communications and internal improvements.
- Challenging generalised statements of fact about 'the sector'.

Over the last 10 months we have significantly increased our use of Slack and established it as a means of engagement within the Neighbourhood Care Networks. Over time we should be able to show engagement data between users on Slack and, by analysing the conversations and interactions, try to establish how successful different groups are at collaborating with each other.

This is like the way in which Ratio made use of the WhatsApp data from the Street-to-Scale fund to establish ethical and non-ethical behaviour.

8.1.2 Financial management

We have moved from multiple spreadsheets to one. Our accounts are now transparent, robust and appropriate for an organisation such as POP.

[weblink] [Transparency – Plymouth Octopus Project](#)

We now know what our core costs are:

Core costs	21/22	20/21
Tax & pensions		£20,705
POP ideas	£34,097	£28,587
Overheads (rent etc)	£24,388	£13,718
Network support	£28,552	£16,864
Learning & communication	£39,452	£33,859
Core Co-ordination	£79,615	£51,026
Totals	£206,103	£164,759

The increase is due to cost-of-living increases, increasing Associate hourly rates and appointing a new Core Lead post.

8.1.3 Reflective Practice and learning through doing

POP is noticing a shift in the ways in which we work emerging in team interactions. The 'space' to question and challenge each other is high and team dynamics have remained very positive over the pandemic despite not having met face-to-face for twelve months. There are regular digital team spaces created in team meetings

during which POP reviews progress. The main challenges with this are finding the time to do this and keeping the discipline within the team to engage in the process.

An important element is building relationships and supporting each other as we seek to do things differently, such as, when implementing a funding process which is new, and the online platforms are unfamiliar to us. Through weekly meetings we have kept a close eye on changes by sharing with each other the examples we have come across and continuing to learn through doing. All team members have equal input and can safely share errors and together solve problems. This has resulted in tweaks to processes as they arise, and through which learning continues to be shared.

Developing and practicing listening, is internally beneficial through greater insight, knowledge, and empathy. It is also externally beneficial and helps the team to support and guide people who may also be navigating new things.

We continue our efforts to strengthen our team (particularly as we continue to work remotely); allowing time to understand what each individual needs to function well as part of a team and how we foster a greater sense and understanding of this with staff, trustees, and associates.

Various models have been explored and tried out within the POP team e.g., Kolb's Reflective Learning Cycle. A Microsoft Teams channel has been created for the sole purpose of reflective practice. Self-care in the form of resourcing has also been explored and 1-1 reflective staff sessions held. Now that POP has more capacity, the reflective practice already in place will be built upon further.

9 SUMMARY & THE FUTURE

9.1 DOUBLE LOOP LEARNING

The challenge and process of writing this report has been a moment of reflection. The 'requirement' as it comes from a body outside POP, with power over POP has forced this exercise into a priority status. And it has been helpful. This is an observation POP will embed into its role as a funder, understanding the potential power we have to stimulate helpful and productive reflection.

9.2 DIRECTION & THEMES

The dream is to create the most connected and collaborative city in the UK.

Crucially, this includes citizens taking a central role through individual and collective effort. People in the lead.

POP's direction is of an organisation highly confident in the values, ethics and principles that guides our work. The direction is set for the future.

Tell and 'live' the story of collective success.

POP will build a strong narrative of collective action and stories of 'we'. We will do this through our communication routes, including the Plymouth Chronicle and through the leadership we as a team demonstrate with our partners, members, networks and strategically.

Champion the grassroots and community development

By having an excellent grasp, robust data, and expert knowledge of informal and small organisations, we can describe, amplify and celebrate the efforts, turning the invisible, visible. To do this we need to continue to grow our membership, reach and use of data.

POP also needs to look to the future of citizen action and grassroots activity and call for investment in community development within Plymouth.

Build connections and support effective networks.

POP will continue to hold open spaces for connections to grow and bring network leaders together to connect and amplify the work for which networks become conduits for. Specific effort will go into building a network infrastructure for hyper local groups and reaching into communities that traditionally do not have a voice, with the aim to increase diversity of perspective in the sector and beyond.

Develop co-design expertise.

Building from this, we believe that the valuable experience gained next year through our lead on two city-wide co-design processes, POP will continue to develop expertise and use this to tackle other complex issues faced in Plymouth.

Support learning, skills, and capacity building

We all need organisations that are well run and individuals that can reflect on the skills they need. POP will curate, deliver and support reflection and learning on the critical aspects of running organisations, working collaboratively, and operating within networks. We will continue to focus on 'how we support peer learning'.

Bring other funders alongside.

POP believes we have a compelling offer for other funders. Many have identified problems with the current system, but do not yet have an answer. We believe the innovative approaches we are taking are significant. We need to continue our work and structure our learning and activity so that other funders can work with us.

Double down on digital.

Before the pandemic, the extent of POPs reach would not have been achievable, but in the last twelve months we have seen, through digital technology, how POP has extended its reach and helped to make a significant difference to work of our members, and, to other non-member organisations/individuals. There is a window of opportunity that both the pandemic and POPs use of technology has opened through which we can embed a digital platform that is designed for citizens and communities, by citizens and communities.

Our partner, Our Plymouth is able to develop a customised solution for Plymouth.

These themes are consistent with POP's mission to support and lead real, purposeful, and lasting change in Plymouth through building strong grassroots organisations, charities and social enterprises and supporting them to work together and take a lead role in creating change.

Our values, ethics and principles are consistent with everything we do.