Working together for Change

# Introduction to POP

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 Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (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.

Our purpose is to support and lead real, purposeful and lasting change in Plymouth. Our role is to build strong grassroots organisations, charities and social enterprises by supporting them to work together and take a lead role in creating change. We are driven by the energy, passion and skills of local people taking action to make our society and environment a better place to live. A small team of dedicated staff, associates and trustees do this by influencing, connecting, training and creating opportunities.   
  
Our values define everything we do: 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.

**POP has 493 members, 74% of which have a turnover under £100k per year. Over the last 7 years we have supported £8.5m of successful funding applications.**

**What is POP?**

POP is the gardener, the pollinator and landscape designer within the relational ‘spaces’ we care for in our community. We help connections form, ideas spread and collaborations emerge.

# A Partner Required

We have four aims for this partnership:

1. Help capture and evaluate the impact of collaboration in Plymouth.
2. Communicate this successfully and succinctly.
3. Bring people together around the findings and to celebrate the work of POP.
4. Contribute or lead a discussion to support the reimagining of how Plymouth could operate in the future.

We are seeking a **partner organisation** to work with POP to achieve this. It is important that the partner can demonstrate the same commitment to collaboration as POP does and shares, in your own way, the aims above. We want to work with you in collaboration to achieve a shared goal.

## In more detail

1. Help capture and evaluate the impact of collaboration in Plymouth

We want to strengthen the case for collaboration. In all our work POP sees the massive benefit from working together. But much of this can go unseen, as can the skills, capacities and ways of working that make it successful. The journey to collaboration is a critical aspect of this as are all the unpredictable consequences of organic connection and networks. We want to explore this journey, the internal dynamics of working together and any connections at a city or strategic level that have been made. We hope the evaluation will use participatory methods such as Ripple Effect Mapping <https://ppe.cw.wsu.edu/ripple-effects-mapping/> to draw this out, reflect it back to participants and produce material for use within future POP reports, blogs and publicity.

What we are not (explicitly) looking for is how POP has played a role in this journey – although if this emerges then it should not be excluded. We simply want to tell the story of collaboration as it is directly experienced at two levels:

* City wide with our statutory partners – with grassroots organisations and others
* By grassroots and community groups – between groups and strategically if relevant

The audience for this work will be the 490+ POP members, other partners within the VCSE sector and the statutory sector. One focus will be on organisations and groups under £100k turnover per year. POP has many positive relationships with collaborations some of which POP is part of, but the commissioned partners may also bring their own relationships into focus. We will specifically draw on the following to recruit participants:

* POP ideas team
* POP Collectives and other POP funded collaborations including Keyham projects
* Unify Plymouth
* Belong in Plymouth
* Neighbourhood Network and other network members

1. Communicate this successfully and succinctly to a wide audience.

We think a video is probably the best medium to achieve this. It would be able to capture critical moments of the process above, first-hand experiences of collaboration and what makes it easier and what makes it harder to collaborate. The output should be seen as a resource for the city of Plymouth to use to celebrate collaboration.

As a point of detail, and assuming a video is the appropriate output, it would be helpful to have a shorter version to be shared via social media and a longer version for the website and to circulate to partners.

*Once we have completed the above work we then must make the case for organisations like POP to play the unique roles to aid the growth of work of communities. In POPs experience small, grassroots activity is very often overlooked and misunderstood. Further to this collaboration can also go unseen or taken for granted even by those organisations who are part of productive collaborations.*

1. Bring people together around the findings and to celebrate the work of POP.

POP believes an event or events would allow moments of connection and creativity and fun for POP members to come together view the output and evaluation output and at the same time POP can promote and celebrate our role and own success alongside our peers in the sector.

1. Contribute or lead a discussion to support the reimagining of how Plymouth could operate in the future.

This discussion will ask “what next?”. Plymouth has significant levels of collaboration already. What does ‘better’ look like? What do we need to do to achieve this? We started this conversation last year when we submitted a bid into the Lottery Growing Great Idea funds <https://pop.kumu.io/growing-a-great-idea>. It will also build on the engagement and discussions held through RIOs State of Us work [TheStateOfUs\_Oct29.pdf (realideas.org)](https://realideas.org/app/uploads/2021/11/TheStateOfUs_Oct29.pdf). It will feed input into Plymouth City Council’s focus on relationships & reconnection, caring & compassionate cities and community empowerment.

It will also help POP shape a vision and advocate for more funding into infrastructure/grassroots support.

### Rationale

The rationale for excluding explicit attribution of POPs influence is that attribution is fraught with methodological error with a big helping of arrogance and overclaiming if it is directly or indirectly suggested. People and organisations make their own change, their own success. The role of POP is secondary to celebrating this. To view it any other way removes the agency of those we seek to support and thereby inadvertently acts against our primary role as support for grassroots groups.

To acknowledge the arrogance in claiming vicarious success is not in opposition or conflict in showing confidence in our own strengths and our role in Plymouth.

We therefore want to highlight, celebrate and make the case for grassroots and grassroots collaboration.

## Budget

Between £15k-20k

## Process

1. Please respond to [matt@plymouthoctopus.org](mailto:matt@plymouthoctopus.org) with an expression of interest. – **by 24th June.** We do NOT need any submission at this stage.
2. We’ll hold an informal conversation with you to explore shared values and outlook.
3. If we agree the conversation is still worth pursuing we’ll invite you to speak with a wider panel of people and invite you to describe what you will bring to the partnership and how you would approach the work.

## Timescales

1. We hope to conclude partner selection by the end of July.
2. Evidence gathering and engagement over August & September
3. POP celebration – POPs AGM is on the 4th October at which we want to present some outputs from the work and use this as the celebration of our work – even if they are not the finish pieces
4. October & November – production of final outputs and city wide discussion of outputs.