

# **FUNDACTION ASSESSMENT**

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**FINAL REPORT (V2)**

## Table of Contents

<b><i>About this report</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
Methodology and Data.....	3
<b><i>Section 1: What is new about FundAction?</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
Pan-European.....	4
Hands-off donors.....	4
A focus on activists.....	5
Interaction between members.....	5
Systems or systemic change.....	5
<b><i>Section 2: Assessment of FundAction</i></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>By core values</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Democratic and Participatory.....	8
Inclusivity.....	10
Openness.....	12
Mutual Trust and Respect.....	13
Peer-to-Peer.....	14
Transparency.....	15
Autonomy.....	16
<b>By participant type</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Activists.....	18
Founding donors.....	19
Facilitation Group.....	21
<b><i>Further reading</i></b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b><i>Annexes</i></b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Annex 1</b> .....	<b>1</b>
What is participatory grantmaking, and why does it matter? .....	1
Recent participatory funds of note .....	2
<b>Annex 2</b> .....	<b>3</b>
FundAction: Key Facts and Figures.....	3
How FundAction works.....	4
Who can be a participant?.....	6
Types of grants.....	7
<b>Annex 3</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Original Evaluation framing document.....	8
Survey questions.....	10
Phase 1 Report.....	12

## About this report

This report is a brief, internal assessment of the participatory grantmaking fund FundAction, jointly established by four European philanthropic foundations in 2017, and involving over 100 European activists. It was commissioned by Menno Weijs of the European Cultural Foundation, one of the founding donors of FundAction, from Sameer Padania of Macroscopic London.

## Methodology and Data

At the time of the project's design, we found few documents in the public domain that establish a replicable methodology for assessing or evaluating participatory grantmaking mechanisms. Since establishing such a methodology is not a purpose of this assessment, we have approached this with a pragmatic outlook, borrowing analytical methods from different approaches as needed. We have compiled a list of *Further Reading* on participatory grantmaking at the end of this document.

This final report draws on in-depth interviews with participating activists and the founding donors, desk research and a member survey to provide an independent assessment of how well the Fund is meeting its founding vision, objectives and values. It is neither an in-depth evaluation of the Fund's performance, nor of the quality of the grants it has made, nor of the technical aspects of the Decidim platform, though interviewees did offer perspectives on each of these areas.

One of the limitations of the assessment is that FundAction has little baseline data, and data collected since the start of the project were deemed to be too uneven to rely on in analysis outside of very broad statements (e.g. Overall level of participation in online voting). Some structured and some open-ended data is requested of participants at the point of registration, and some activity data is collected through the Decidim platform used by the fund, but this was deemed insufficiently complete, both in terms of its depth and its quantity, to be used in this report. The Fund has a website and social channels through which it communicates, though these have been largely about communicating with participants rather than with broader publics. Subsequent assessments or evaluations may be able to make more use of them as data accrue, and the impact of decision-making in these areas can more properly be assessed.

The preliminary set of interviews and desk research led to an inception report that was presented for validation at the Assembly of the FundAction membership in April 2018. FundAction then conducted a survey of members. After the Assembly, Macroscopic conducted further interviews and desk research, culminating in a draft report, in August 2018, and, subsequent to comments and clarifications from the FundAction Facilitation Group, this final report in November 2018.

## Section 1: What is new about FundAction?

Participatory funds are not a new phenomenon<sup>1</sup>, neither are collaborative funds in which funders pool resources. FundAction does however represent a new combination of elements, and it is important to note, before coming to the assessment, what this comprises.

### Pan-European

The fund covers a region that has diverse languages, political levels and systems, economies, cultures, stages of development, and media and communication cultures. It spans countries from the most transparent to the most corrupt, from highly ethnically diverse to those with little diversity at all, and from pluralist and socially progressive to extremely conservative. Unlike some other regions of the world, where workable commonalities might stem from a colonial past, political union, or common religion or language, Europe is very heterogeneous. Trying to cover this area while also respecting sometimes diverse, competing or even conflicting values is tricky, and involves continuous negotiation and adjustment.

### Hands-off donors

As Cynthia Gibson's 2017 paper for the Ford Foundation<sup>2</sup> made clear, most philanthropic donors are still at the stage where they are considering how to make some aspect of their processes more participatory, by including or being informed by direct beneficiaries. New resources such as the 2018 GrantCraft guide to participatory grantmaking<sup>3</sup> – also by Cynthia Gibson, but with deep involvement from key participatory funds and funders<sup>4</sup> – have sought to address this need through developing practical advice for donors. During 2018, a number of academic papers have been published incorporating or focusing on participatory grantmaking approaches<sup>5</sup>.

Most donors find it hard to conceive of a situation in which they would relinquish all control over any of their funds in anything other than a time-bound experiment. By contrast, although the founding donors of FundAction are involved in decision-making about the fund in a structural sense, they have been unequivocal that they want, as a central tenet of the fund, to experiment with giving up control over the grant-making element of the fund entirely. It is a political and institutional reality that the donor representatives are using the fund as a learning opportunity, but this is accepted by the activists as something that is necessary to embed and grow the fund so that it can involve and serve increased

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<sup>1</sup> For further details both about participatory grantmaking in general, and about the specific mechanics of FundAction, see Annex 1.

<sup>2</sup> Gibson, Cynthia - *Participatory Grantmaking: Has its time come?* (Ford Foundation, 2017) [https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/3599/participatory\\_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf](https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/3599/participatory_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Gibson, Cynthia – *Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking* (GrantCraft, 2018) <http://www.grantcraft.org/guides/deciding-together>

<sup>4</sup> A number of participatory funds and funders contributed insights and interviews to GrantCraft's resource section on participatory grantmaking: <http://www.grantcraft.org/content-series/participatory-grantmaking>; See also IssueLab's section: <http://participatorygrantmaking.issuelab.org/>

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the academic papers referenced at [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=%22participatory+grantmaking%22+OR+%22participatory+funding%22&btnG=](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=%22participatory+grantmaking%22+OR+%22participatory+funding%22&btnG=)

## ECF – FUNDATION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

numbers of peers. Furthermore, that this is being incubated by the EDGE Funders Alliance<sup>6</sup> is a sign the learnings of the fund will not just be restricted to the four donors involved directly.

### **A focus on activists**

Relatively few funds focus specifically on activists, and many activists will not accept foundation funding, or indeed are not even aware of the philanthropic field or that they might be eligible to apply for funds from philanthropic entities. By pooling funds, co-creating the structure and rules with diverse invited activists, handing over decision-making control to participants, and remaining entirely hands-off, the funders have enabled even activists with reservations to suspend their disbelief to a sufficient extent to engage. This then enables the funds to reach a wider and more diverse range of activists than the funders would have been able to reach if acting unilaterally, without these firewalls.

Furthermore, the fund is designed to be as accessible and light-touch as possible, and to place few if any bureaucratic burdens on recipients of grants. Limitations do exist, however - the current practical necessity that participants should have a good command of English and should be comfortable participating in online processes may exclude, for now, many legitimate potential participants who can't do either, particularly grassroots or local groups.

### **Interaction between members**

The majority of interaction between members of FundAction is through its online Decidim platform. At the time that the research for this report was conducted, the platform was primarily used for offering feedback on proposals, and decision-making on grant rounds, and meaningful online interaction was restricted to discussion about the projects proposed through the platform<sup>7</sup>. The annual Assembly provides a counterbalance to this, as approximately one-third of the membership comes to this in-person meeting to discuss and make collective decisions. Members have expressed a desire that the emphasis of the Decidim platform should increasingly shift towards being a place for learning, exchange and collaboration between activists across Europe, with a funding mechanism attached.

### **Systems or systemic change**

FundAction is an unusual initiative for some of the funders and activists involved in that it explicitly states that it aims for systemic change. Not everyone - even some involved in the fund - understands what systems thinking or systems change activism are, and why they represent a different way of thinking about activism, and funding. Beyond the participatory dimension of its approach, FundAction has a unique opportunity to explain the systems change approach for a broader audience (including some of its own participants).

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://edgefunders.org/fundaction/>

<sup>7</sup> Due to the iterative nature of the FundAction project, measures to address this have been discussed and initiated in the intervening period. Feedback on the draft of this report noted that interaction between activists has not yet extended to discussion of “the actual contexts the activists are working on in Europe, and requests for other forms of support [beyond] grants.”

## Section 2: Assessment of FundAction

### By core values

This section offers a brief assessment of FundAction’s core values as expressed in the original Evaluation plan, and as they relate to how the fund is run, the impact on philanthropic practice, and the impact in a broader European context. While, as noted at the outset, it is too early in FundAction’s journey for an in-depth evaluation of the success or otherwise of its work, interviewees did touch on several of these aspects in their semi-structured interviews - both prompted and unprompted. We have synthesised these observations into statements responding to each value in relation to how FundAction is run, and, where the data provided answers, in relation to philanthropic practice, and to the broader European context.

FundAction advertises these values clearly on its password-protected site at <https://assembly.fundaction.eu/pages/values>, as follows:

*We commit to the following values and rationales inspired by the Jimez [sic] Principles for Democratic Organising:<sup>8</sup>*

#### **Democracy**

*The fund: It is made and run in a democratic and participatory way by the community so it is driven and affected by its own decisions*

*European context: The legitimacy of the prevailing democratic system has been degrading due to corporate capture of the Nation State and a political elite which has failed to defend or promote people’s rights, which leads to a lack of citizen participation, loss of trust and participation. The best solutions to the crises Europe faces will require the participation and engagement of the public: we believe that the only way to tackle patriarchy and forms of dominations and exclusion based on cultural background, race, class, gender, sex, sexuality, education, access, ability is through active participation and decision making of all.*

#### **Inclusivity**

*The fund: As much as diversity is championed as the beating heart of the fund and its community, an inclusive mindset is key to achieve this.*

*European context: Diversity in Europe is under multiple attacks. We defend that diversity has been and still is, an enriching part of our societies. It is our current reality and as such a common good for building our future. This won’t happen if we remain passive: we’re committed to be pro-active and intentional.*

#### **Openness**

*The fund: The community seeks to expand and renew itself and is open to new people and ideas.*

*Europe: Europe is not a closed entity - bordered by patrol and control. We see Europe as an evolving community.*

#### **Mutual trust and respect**

*The fund: Trust in other people’s ideas and skills and respect for their viewpoints and actions roots the fund in good human relations and builds great collaboration.*

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<sup>8</sup> The Jimez Principles for Democratic Organising were adopted in 1996, and can be viewed at <https://www.ejnet.org/ej/jimez.pdf>

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

*Europe: Social change happens when there are spaces for open conversations and active listening. The platform and fund will create the conditions for these conversations to happen with the goal to regenerate solidarity in Europe and allow communities to discover common ground based on trusting relationships.*

### **Peer-to-Peer**

*The fund: Learning from and with each other through inspiration by peers / participants without hierarchy between who is learning and teaching. Sharing to avoid replication and makes use of existing tools and practices.*

*Europe: Our ambition is to enhance and develop more collaboration and exchange to promote/highlight the commons at a new scale.*

### **Transparency**

*The fund: The network and actions supported by the fund will be made visible to contribute to a great participatory engagement and public accountability.*

*Europe: We intend to promote and demand transparency as a first step towards more accountability - our own accountability as well as the one of those who have and might keep having power over our lives to transform into a collective power, found in community and common ground.*

### **Autonomy**

*The fund: Participants will decide about funding autonomously from funders.*

*Europe: Nothing about us will happen without us!*

## Democratic and Participatory

**This value interrogates how well the fund is living up to the core values of democracy and participation, and whether this is translating into the individual and institutional practice of participating funders and activists. It aims particularly to “tackle patriarchy and forms of dominations and exclusion based on cultural background, race, class, gender, sex, sexuality, education, access, ability.”**

*The fund is run in a democratic and participatory way.*

The overall assessment communicated by activists and funders alike is that FundAction is run in a democratic and participatory way, and that this is gradually improving in quality. Activists are given clear parameters for when they are asked to input on decisions, the delegated authority of the Facilitation Group is viewed positively, and all agree that the funders do not exercise any control at all on the running of the fund.

That said, there are caveats:

- Interviewees report that there is continued disagreement between those for whom the primary focus of the fund should be the integrity of its participatory and deliberative processes, and those for whom the fund’s focus should be on making grants informed by processes that are participatory or democratic enough. The former approach is characterised by interviewees as being anchored in the experience of members in the municipalist movement particularly.

- Because the fund is primarily run and administered through an online platform, and in English, this naturally limits the range of people who can meaningfully or readily participate, and puts people not used to participating in online commenting culture at an initial disadvantage.

*Philanthropic institutions are more aware of their power and consider to adopt democratic principles in their grant making and governance.*

While the participating grantmakers do report learning significant amounts through the FundAction process and decisions, the prospect of this affecting either their or other philanthropic institutions more broadly is premature. The funders involved in FundAction are already disposed to a greater or lesser degree to changing their relationship with grantees from a pure donor-recipient one, to one that transfers some, if not all of the power to field groups and activists in some parts of their funding. Barriers to giving up some or most of the power referred to remain within these and other foundations, including resistance from fellow grantmakers and trustees.

While reports such as the ones covered in the *Further Reading* section at the end of this report, and mentions of participatory grantmaking in other publications, toolkits and articles all help to normalise the concept as a legitimate part of the grantmaker’s arsenal, this is far from translating into shifts across the sector. Interviewees felt that the publication of the GrantCraft guide on participatory philanthropy may provide a springboard to wider, more practical discussion within and between foundations and other grantmaking entities, and subsequent changes in practice in parts of the sector.

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

*The activist community in Europe feels empowered to fight for active participation and decision making of all.*

A small proportion of the interviewees - particularly those who had received funding through one of the funding rounds - felt more empowered and confident in their work compared to before their participation. Receiving feedback, validation and funding from FundAction peers had improved and reinforced their belief in their own work.

## Inclusivity

**This value interrogates how well the fund is living up to the core values of inclusion and diversity, and whether this is translating into the individual and institutional practice of participating funders and activists. It calls on the fund to be “pro-active and intentional” in upholding this value.**

*The members of FundAction are from diverse backgrounds and feel included in decision-making.*

FundAction has multiple levels and dimensions on which it is attempting to address the questions of inclusion and diversity, and all interviewees agreed that it is not possible to address these all at once, but that the fund is on the right trajectory or direction of travel. They also felt that the fund and the Facilitation Group made very good efforts to inform and include participating activists in decision-making processes, and that these are being regularly refined and improved. All observed, however, that this did not translate into similarly diverse participation in the online platform. The meaning of inclusion and diversity shifts as it moves from a single neighbourhood or city, to a regional or national level, and then to the Europe-wide level, and therefore, most interviewees are pragmatic about the pace at which this is happening. Most were satisfied with the gender balance in the overall setting, if not in individual parts of the process, and were comfortable with the ethnic and cultural diversity, noting that it was evolving with each new intake of participants. They recognise that it is difficult and possibly undesirable to socially engineer to a significant degree to include every single parameter of diversity. One consistent message from more than half the interviewees, however, was that the socio-economic diversity of participants was not yet diverse enough, and that too many of the initial participants, understandably given that the initial set of invitations came from the foundations, represented organised forms of civil society, rather than the ‘harder to reach’ activists.

The difference of opinion over whether the fund is democratic enough also affects how some interviewees see this parameter. In order to support certain kinds of excluded voices, and in the service of social justice, should the fund actively exclude other, perhaps over-represented or more systemically privileged activists - or should the fund trust that robust processes of participation and deliberation will ensure diversity of input and debate, and will balance out over time? Most interviewees acknowledge that there can never be a perfect balance of representation, inclusion and intersectionality, but felt that the fund should take active measures to ensure that the composition of the participating activist body is appropriately diverse, and changes over time.

One particular area of concern around inclusion that at least one-third of interviewees raised was on gender. This was raised in relation to unequal effort between some men and some women in the Facilitation Group (FG) in the Phase 1 preparatory report, and was reinforced in the Phase 2 interviews both in respect of the FG and of some situations in which female members at the Assembly were made to feel disempowered or uncomfortable. Interviewees acknowledged that, in such a diverse group, there are likely to be differences of opinion and approach, and that the best way to deal with these is to establish values and principles with absolute clarity at the beginning, at regular junctures through the project, and prior to any major interactions, whether in person (as in the Assembly) or online (such as decision-making processes on grants).

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

*Foundations are more aware of the need to be inclusive and to apply diversity as a core principle in their work.*

The participating foundations were all aware of this parameter, and have indicated that through FundAction their institutions have all been able to reach the kinds of actors that they would not have been able to reach through more traditional methods. Because this increases the visibility of the groups involved and begins to build more networks between groups across Europe, all the foundations were pleased with progress on this front after the first two rounds of funding. This is a tangible benefit that they can report back to colleagues and trustees. Whether these 'newly visible' groups then transition to being funded by individual funders, and whether they develop the confidence to seek funds from a wider variety of sources, is a key indicator for subsequent evaluations to assess.

*The activist community in Europe feels empowered to fight for an inclusive, diverse Europe.*

There was very little in the interviews that emerged on this topic, outside of an increased sense of solidarity with others working on similar themes or with similar methods across the continent.

## Openness

**This value interrogates how well the fund is living up to the core value of openness, and whether this is translating into the individual and institutional practice of participating funders and activists**

*FundAction is regularly joined by new members, who are not always known to the existing members. These new members bring in new ideas and feel welcomed in the community.*

This is a fundamental part of the FundAction proposition, but all acknowledged that, as the community grows in size and diversity, there may be a need in the near future to slow down or restrict the types of new members according to agreed needs and priorities. Interviewees were deliberately chosen to reflect those who joined the community at different stages of its evolution. Around one third of interviewees joined in the six months prior to the interviews (i.e. From the beginning of 2018) and felt welcomed and well-supported with information about participation. Most of the other interviewees had either been involved in other activities of the funders,

Many interviewees raised concerns, because invitations are largely allocated through referral by existing members, about pre-existing relationships, friendships or even cliques between participating activists, and how this might affect, for example, voting habits in decision-making processes in the early rounds of the fund. While they did not suggest that there had been any impropriety, a number of interviewees did suggest that the FG look more closely at, for example, how the online platform might include certain benchmarks or incentives that counteract the risk of conscious or unconscious biases like these, or the risk of lobbying or vote trading, in the online voting mechanics. The majority of those who were at the Assembly said that, despite there only being one-third of the overall community there, it helped to build more trust and connections between people who did not already know each other.

*Philanthropic institutions are more aware of the bubbles they are operating in and investigate ways to reach out to other communities.*

Funder interviewees were unequivocal that FundAction was already delivering on their hopes that, by working together, pooling resources, and relinquishing control, this would build interest and trust from other 'bubbles' that they had previously been unable to reach, and that this was a finding to report back to colleagues and trustees.

*In the messaging of the FundAction members, Europe is framed as an evolving community, rather than a closed entity bordered by patrol and control.*

This was not addressed by any of the interviewees.

## Mutual Trust and Respect

**This value interrogates how well the fund is upholding the core values of mutual trust and respect, and whether this is translating into the individual and institutional practice of participating funders and activists, and positively impacting on power imbalances.**

*Members of FundAction and its Facilitation Group and Peer Panels trust in other members' ideas and skills and respect their viewpoints and actions.*

Most participants in the research reported that they felt respected and trusted in most settings, bar two notable exceptions: the first iteration of the Facilitation Group, and certain spaces within the Assembly.

Facilitation Group: two Phase 1 interviewees reported that the FG needed to be fully engaged, and its work needed to be more equitably and accountably managed. This arose from the perception that the roles had been allowed to become very gendered.

Assembly: one interviewee reported a specific incident in which she was trying to speak in a smaller group setting but was continually talked over by a succession of three white male participants. "I had to wait and wait. We should make specific space for women to be able to speak, maybe by reminding everyone at the beginning of every session that they should be mindful."

*Mutual trust and respect between activists and funders has increased, which diminishes the traditional power imbalances in philanthropy.*

It is difficult to gauge both sides of this equation, as the funders, in general, tended to express themselves in more supportive and understanding ways about the challenges faced by activists, than vice-versa. Interviewed activists, however, almost universally report having more understanding for the constraints and pressures that individual grantmakers face, having gone through the process of having to decide on grants - or, as one activist put it, "learning to say 'No'..." This understanding does not extend to the funding institutions, which received criticism - as noted in Phase 1 - for not allocating more funds for longer to the FundAction experiment.

*Spaces for open conversations and active listening are created, which contribute to regeneration of solidarity in Europe and allow communities to discover common ground based on trusting relationships.*

This was not addressed by any of the interviewees.

## Peer-to-Peer

**This value interrogates how well the fund is working on the peer-to-peer level, both between activists themselves, and between activists and funders.**

*Members of FundAction are learning from and with each other through inspiration, without hierarchy between who is learning and teaching. They are sharing to avoid replication and make use of existing tools and practices.*

This remains an ideal, rather than a reality, partly because of the semi-competitive structure - some activists argue - of the voting and decision-making process over grant applications. This aspect of FundAction was where interviewees expressed the most frustration in terms of as yet untapped potential. No interviewee felt that FundAction had yet evolved into a 'peer-learning environment', although all of them felt that this was a desirable next step. Most also expressed a desire to go beyond learning, into direct collaboration within the network, especially if funds were available to explore or prototype this.

One interviewee described an in-person interaction that fell short of these standards and of the Mutual Trust and Respect value too. At the Assembly, she felt overruled and marginalised by male participants in one of the workshops. She composed herself and pushed back forcefully, but felt dispirited by the incident, and recommended that the facilitators take further measures to flag up and regularly reinforce more respectful ways to interact that enable effective peer-to-peer working in such settings.

*Foundations are more interested to work with activists as peers and to engage in co-creating and sharing knowledge and learnings.*

The founding foundations that already had a track record in working with autonomous networks of this kind said that they are keen to continue along this path. They acknowledge, however, that establishing better ways of measuring and showing results in this domain will become increasingly necessary for funding organisations that have bureaucratic and regulatory needs to fulfil. Beyond these core foundations, it is notable that few major foundations are yet embracing participatory and co-creation methods or approaches (although interviewees who addressed this noted that new resources like the 2018 GrantCraft guide would help the sector to understand the approach from a more practical standpoint).

*Opportunities for exchange and peer to peer collaboration are enhanced and developed and the Commons are promoted as a model of collaboration and a value system for society.*

Even if the opportunities for this within the fund are limited at this point, some activists who describe themselves as 'less networked' report that exposure to the possibilities and the FundAction network has opened their eyes and motivated them to seek out more connections. On the funder side, the European Cultural Foundation reports that the FundAction model is under discussion for other areas of its work and strategy.

## Transparency

**This value interrogates how well the fund is operating in a transparent way, and whether this is translating into the individual and institutional practice of participating funders and activists.**

*The processes, networks and actions supported by FundAction are visible to the public.*

This is technically true, via the social and online channels of the fund, though the levels of public interest are reportedly, and understandably, very low. In the longer term, suggested a couple of interviewees, this could evolve into a better measure of the trust and legitimacy of FundAction, compared to other kinds of funding vehicles.

*Philanthropic institutions are more transparent, more accessible, and are able and willing to recognize their own failures.*

Within the context of the fund and its participating donors, this is broadly true, both in the interviews provided by activists and funders, and in studying the communication from the fund. In respect of the broader funding institutions, or indeed the broader funding landscape, which is acknowledged to move very slowly, FundAction has had little or no impact as yet, as its results are only now beginning to emerge. Any incremental changes in the transparency, accessibility or self-critique of philanthropic institutions cannot yet be attributed to FundAction.

*FundAction grants promote transparency as a first step towards more accountability and the transformation of power into a collective power, found in community and common ground.*

Interviews were conducted mostly around the time of the second round of grants. As such, participants were cautious to draw any conclusions beyond vague impressions from the very small number of grants and the related processes of round 1 - which were generally positive.

## Autonomy

**This value interrogates how well the fund is managing to ensure that decision-making by activists is protected or insulated from other forms of influence, such as funders, political parties or interest groups.**

*Members of FundAction decide about funding autonomously from any external actors, such as funders, political parties or interest groups.*

All agree this is absolutely the case. Activists all report that decision-making was not influenced by any outside actors at any stage.

This does not include an assessment of dynamics within the activist membership itself, and whether there are informal affinity groups or networks. This was addressed more properly in the Peer-to-peer section.

This also does not include an assessment of whether - as some interviewees noted - the way in which individual participants assess the grant proposal essentially replicates the same questions and approaches of a traditional funder - this is addressed further below.

*The donors involved in the platform leave space to the community of activists to take decisions and don't interfere in funding decisions.*

All agree that this is also absolutely the case. The funders have scrupulously kept their distance from the decision-making processes about grantmaking, and have expressed forcefully how much they take this as an absolute precondition of their participation. It is still not clear how they will translate this into practical recommendations or practices for other parts of the funding organisations they work for, and whether there are mechanisms for these organisations to properly metabolise any such recommendations, but the individual funder representatives themselves are highly committed to this model. The founding funders note that, through precursor discussions with grantee networks, activists expressed their desire for such a model, and co-designed what was to become FundAction collaboratively with the donors. They noted, however, that in convening and framing the original co-design meeting in Seville, the donors did play a decisive role in setting the terrain.

Activists who were initially sceptical as to whether such a model would actually be implemented have all expressed their surprise and their appreciation for this, with one caveat, however. Several interviewees expressed the feeling that, although the funders were not involved in decision-making about grantmaking at all, the entire structure had been conceived by the donors, and that therefore it could not help but be influenced by them to some degree. On probing, this is, however, contradicted, as most who made this observation also agreed that FundAction looks very different from what a funder would have designed alone.

Furthermore, some activist interviewees admitted either being underwhelmed by some of the grant decisions ("That's what a funder would have picked") or to themselves being affected by what they thought a good grant decision would look like. Some of the activists recalled seeing, but not

## ECF – FUNDATION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

interacting with the donors at the Assembly - and a couple of interviewees asked for more structured feedback and input from expert donor staff.

*The activist community feels empowered in their social struggles. Nothing about us, without us!*

As with other value areas, activists did not specifically address this question, but approached it with a general sense that being in contact and cohort with dozens of others working in similar areas, issues or methods was instructive and inspiring.

## By participant type

### Activists

**The fund, to deliver on its initial promise, ought to be centred on the activists, on the movement, rather than on the source of the funds, or the bureaucratic structures that deliver the funds to recipients. How well the fund does this, is the key benchmark for how well it is doing overall. In total, nine activists (each from a different country) were interviewed for the assessment. This section summarises the key and consistent feedback from interviewees of all types particularly on the composition of the activist membership of FundAction, and the knock-on effects this has for the fund.**

“Drawing this distinction so heavily between funders and activists,” said one activist, “has its uses but it also is unhelpful in some areas.” More than one interviewee noted that activists were stricter in evaluating proposals, for example, than donors would ever be. “Why are you asking for x, why demand y of grantees, and why place that restriction? They have the zeal of religious converts...” This was not being done, the activist clarified, out of self-interest, or the instinct of competition: “They’ve never done [grantmaking] before, and they are remembering the things that have been done to them by donors.” (One interview referred to the activists’ ‘Stockholm Syndrome with the funders’...)

The language barrier - since the fund’s operating language is English - needs to be addressed for the fund to function better and to evolve in the direction that all stakeholders hope for. This is true of the application materials, the website and Decidim platform, and the in-person meetings, including the Assembly (where “lots of translation is needed”) and the “fancy setting”. One person suggested greater use of audio and video to help take the accent away from written materials in English.

In a linked criticism, a number of interviewees - some spontaneously, and some on probing - referred to the need to address the “class” dimension of the activist body. Although diversity along other axes like gender and ethnicity were felt in the main to be well-addressed, the first intake and some of the subsequent invited activists still reflected a “lack of diversity in institutional background” (a perception exists that the fund is “designed by and for smallish but relatively well-established groups or organisations”), and to some degree a lack of geographical diversity. At the Assembly, said one more recent joiner, “people were so experienced - they were those who could reply [to the invitation], nominate themselves.” Referring to the Assembly, one interviewee noted that “meetings like this are not inclusive by definition - if you went to college, and you’re used to people talking for hours, it is OK.” That said, there was a note of realism, as “cross-class organising takes enormous effort”, and “it is a constant struggle [in cross-European settings] to integrate lower-class, more affected members.” The same commenter noted that in one European network, some participants refused to participate further until the class dynamic was actively addressed.

The tension between selecting individuals to participate, and to what degree they represent or carry a mandate from a group, or collective or organisation was noted by a few interviewees. Do these individuals go back to their own contexts and disseminate what they have learned, and play an onward connecting role? And how do they represent the perspectives and needs of others when they participate in FundAction? One interviewee called specifically for extra funding to enable a second person from each organisation or network to participate, to help diversify the membership further.

One interviewee - part of an existing Europe-wide network - expressed a specific desire to play a “more conscious and structured” connecting and bridging role to a wider variety of activists, with a view to bringing them into or at least closer to FundAction, and by proxy, to individual donor organisations. The gender dimension of this was addressed at the beginning of the project, noted one interviewee, after they realised that “the general membership started with men, who invited more

men, and even the women invited men. Yet online, it is mainly the women who are commenting on others' proposals."

Interviewees repeatedly mentioned the need to support those who aren't aware they can access funds from donors, or can't access funds from other sources. More than one interviewee questioned whether the participation of Barcelona en Comun in particular was justified, and whether the funds should be reserved for smaller entities or people who can't access funds from elsewhere. Some activists noted that they do not have a culture of talking to funders, "unlike the institutionalised civil society orgs in Western Europe, where the funders come from, with long history of working together and common understanding, implicit or explicit." Another noted that, since she had never really talked to funders before, she found it difficult to do so at the Assembly. This is a power dynamic noted in other parts of the report, but it was raised by some specifically as a challenge for activists to feel their own legitimacy.

### Founding donors

**This section synthesises – without commentary – feedback from interviewees on the role and involvement of the founding donors in FundAction, including how FundAction was conceived and framed, the size of funds invested in the fund, the risks and realities of new donors coming on board, and the interactions between donors and activists.**

Activist interviewees made clear that the collaborative "process of designing the fund [with donors] has been powerful, even if we ended up somewhere in the middle of what either funders or activists would have designed alone." However, a number of the activist interviewees noted that the funders - perhaps by virtue of the field-level view they have to take - were more radical in their suggestions than the activists, as they wanted to "break free from what is already being done." One activist who participated in the Seville meeting said that their group "didn't have a funder representative [...] and it ended up being the most conservative." This interaction and shared enterprise has ongoing value, said one activist: "Activists don't think in more theoretical terms and don't have time to read up: they can share their grassroots perspective with foundations to show the level of quality of decisions made at that level. But [the interaction with donors is also helpful] to improve the up-to-date-ness of the activists' practice too!"

For those coming from professional or institutional civil society, the grant sizes were felt to be small in financial terms, but that the participatory and solidarity-driven ethos in FundAction offsets this. "Many funders give much bigger grants, [but] these are not distributed in a participatory way," noted one. Those less familiar with the world of philanthropy were becoming aware that the FundAction model may help to overcome the established mechanisms of the funding world through its "trust-based and network-based financing. Many foundations are invite-based - if you're in you're in, and if you're not, you're not."

A mild criticism was expressed by one participant over the framing of the fund's grant lines - that it was "forcing people to make certain kinds of applications." Another activist specified that "we want other unpaid activists to get startup funding for small initiatives that have a good idea." Those more steeped in the language and practice of systems change were keen that the process of explaining this to donors continue, as this would gradually shift the fund's focus to "operating on certain kinds of needs" - specifically, towards supporting "those working according to their own needs, which will lead

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

to genuine innovation.” Some also hoped that this might eventually begin to have an influence over funders’ own practices and approaches more broadly - “we know what can work.”

There was consistent criticism of the small amounts committed to the fund by the founding donors<sup>9</sup> - simply put by one as “There needs to be more money - half of the current money goes just to maintaining the fund itself.” Another newer activist member said “It probably only works if the pot is of a certain size.” Interviewees made reference to a range of reasons for this:

- The most pointed criticism was that, by not scaling up the funds available, the fund was being sustained by “marginalised, hard-to-reach activists funding their own struggles and putting their own labour in - they want us to put them out of business, and to do it in a couple of years”
- the risk that starting small and for a short period would ensure that FundAction could not sustain momentum, or grow sufficiently - “we need to be stronger and bigger”
- The fear that if existing donors do not show that they believe in this method, in systems change approaches, and in a genuine transfer of power, that this will not set a big enough example to other, more traditional funders
- the perception that this means the funders do not want to take risks and this means a “funder logic will seep into the organization”, including that “by scaling down support, donors can encourage you to become sustainable”
- the perplexity of activists particularly that “OSF has a lot of money, and [I thought] they would put a lot of money into this fund because they feel it is important.”

This might be summed up through this quote from an activist:

*It's fine for now, but I hope this will develop into something more substantial. Otherwise grant making will never change. What kind of systemic change do we want? If you mean this seriously, you have to allow disruptive projects or initiatives to be funded - including anti-capitalism or at least that mindset, to step out of that logic.*

As noted elsewhere in the report, everyone agreed that the donors had been scrupulous in recusing themselves structurally and practically from decision-making about grants. (Indeed a few activists echoed the observation that “funding decisions were not radical. Funders would understand what is radical and what is not, and for us [activists] we don’t know this, and we have limited capacity to know what else is going on.”) One interviewee did assert, however, that the donor representatives who have been participating in the establishment of the fund are involved “because of their day-jobs [even if they have activist credentials beyond their day-jobs], and this reinforces that they have the power and the money.” A few interviewees assumed that funders “do not like unrestricted funding” (one activist said that the fund had to clarify its parameters further, to ensure that donors did not get the impression that it is “an open pit”), and that furthermore “no funder will go on endlessly without some kind of point - restricted or unrestricted funding. If we want to grow, have to accept that funders will want a say.”

As regards the composition of the activist members, the donors were praised for actively wanting to move beyond their existing types of grantees, through the fund, to reach types of groups they might not normally fund or might find harder to reach. More pointedly, one interviewee said that donors needed to not reflexively fund those that “work in a logic that reinforces their own vision of

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<sup>9</sup> In the case of FPH, this is specifically because its board does not permit participation in pooled funds, and therefore the only way to contribute was through in-kind donations.

the world - which is hard, because that is their *raison d'être*.” While it was seen as initially helpful that many of the activists involved knew each other through existing grantee networks, and that in a sense this showed that the funders had managed to get to the main activist actors in Europe, this was seen as limiting in the medium- to long-term, as if the fund does not reach out and beyond to channel money to those who cannot get it by other means, it risks institutionalising – it can't be allowed to be “just new international networks done by the same kind of people.”

Finally, ahead of attracting new donors to participate in and contribute to the fund, there was support for the development of an ethical code, “not only about converting bad money into good money, [but because] funders are partners in systemic change.”

### Facilitation Group

**This section synthesises – without commentary – the feedback on the first iteration of the Facilitation Group (FG) – how well did it function, what issues had arisen, did it represent the values of the fund, and how might it be improved?**

The FG was set up in “rather an ad hoc way” (by email from Open Society), offering a small monthly stipend for work on the group. There was “no real discussion of how or why this [initial] group was chosen”, and then the donors “stepped back entirely”, although when asked they offered advice, and one funder acted as the liaison for the FG.

The first six months of the FG were “total chaos at the start”, and then more structured and deliberate. Issues arose around cultural norms between the more activist and more deliberative members of the FG - “putting activists into a decision-making body can bring issues they find hard to deal with”, including that “there are some things you need to make sure will happen, and that are not open to debate.” It is important, said one participant, to “make sure you don't assume that people are ‘aware’” and that therefore issues will not crop up: the fund “needs to be regulated, there need to be rules - and trust.” Balancing these across “different organisational, activist, national, cultural settings”, and indeed between participants who came from grassroots activism as against those who came from professional civil society was a continual challenge. As such, lots of time in the early months was spent on process and philosophy. A process would be developed, discussed, decided upon, and then re-opened and re-explained - “we kept going in circles” - and eventually, coming from such different backgrounds, “it was always going to end up being a compromise, for good and bad reasons”. Because of this, some felt that more time and attention were paid to “logistics over legitimacy” -

Interviewees particularly noted the following:

- There was “no anchor from a *de facto* leader” - which allowed certain differences and dimensions to come to the fore.
- Without leadership, the FG was “dependent on the pace and personality of the individuals involved”
- Some participants were from more forthright and direct communication cultures, and others from less direct cultures. Some were sceptical, some dominant, some stepped back, some stepped forward.

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

- This particularly manifested through the “gendered roles in the FG - coordinating, mopping up extra tasks - [which] developed almost naturally and without conscious decisions.” Feedback to the handover group was to make sure this did not happen in the same way again - both within the FG and the Assembly.
- The fact that a stipend was paid meant that it was in theory easier to ask members about work that needed to be done

Interviewees went on to signal the way ahead for the FG specifically:

- The FG is a microcosm of FundAction as a whole, including the platform, peer learning and the grant making - its issues are the issues of FundAction overall. This is potentially problematic with the socio-economic profile of the body of activists already discussed - “not enough are coming from a grassroots experience”. Particular care and attention needs to be paid to how FG members are chosen and put themselves forward, and that they understand and respect the time commitment - “just because it is participatory, it shouldn’t be hippy land.”
- The better we function, the more we communicate, the more we agree, the same will be true of the fund as a whole. Perhaps need a full-time coordinator
- If the FG can show more specifically what systemic change means for us, what our criteria for funding should be, this means that we can appeal to funders better
- The FG needs to establish a “clearer way of establishing community accountability” (I.e. How do you encourage participation from activist members who have not been active)?

Finally, one activist who was about to start working on the FG noted that many of these concerns had been heard at the Assembly, and that there was collective awareness of the task facing the next incumbents.

## Further reading

A selection of academic and grey literature with a full or partial focus on participatory grantmaking, in reverse chronological order:

- *Grantcraft: Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking* (<http://www.grantcraft.org/content-series/participatory-grantmaking>)
- *Changing Donor-NGO relations through Viable Alternatives to Conventional Grantmaking* - Kio Okawa, SIT Graduate Institute, Capstone Collection 2018 (<https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4170&context=capstones>)
- *Grantcraft Leadership Series: How Community Philanthropy Shifts Power: What Donors Can Do to Help Make That Happen* - Jenny Hodgson and Anna Pond (Foundation Center, 2018) ([https://cdn.givingcompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/25144146/Community\\_Philanthropy\\_paper.pdf](https://cdn.givingcompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/25144146/Community_Philanthropy_paper.pdf))
- *Transforming the humanitarian financing landscape* - Lydia Poole, NEAR Network Strategy Paper, 2018 ([http://www.near.ngo/imgtemp/downloadfile/NEAR%20Network%20Pooled%20Funding%20Strategy%20Paper%20\\_1519808257.pdf](http://www.near.ngo/imgtemp/downloadfile/NEAR%20Network%20Pooled%20Funding%20Strategy%20Paper%20_1519808257.pdf))
- *The Lived Experience* - Baljeet Sandhu, 2017 (<http://thelivedexperience.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-Lived-Experience-Baljeet-Sandhu-VLE-full-report.pdf>)
- *Participatory Grantmaking: Has its time come?* - Cynthia Gibson, for the Ford Foundation, 2017 ([https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/3599/participatory\\_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf](https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/3599/participatory_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf))
- *Monitoring and evaluating participatory grantmaking* - Ceri Hutton, for the Baring Foundation, 2016 (<https://baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Discussion-Paper-ME-for-Participatory-Grantmaking.pdf>)
- *Community Philanthropy: The context, concepts and challenges* - Avila Kilmurray and Jenny Hodgson, Global Fund for Community Foundations, 2015 ([http://www.globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/information-bank/literature-review/Literature\\_Review.pdf](http://www.globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/information-bank/literature-review/Literature_Review.pdf))
- *Letting the Movement Decide: Report on FRIDA Grantmaking* - The Lafayette Practice and FRIDA Young Feminist Fund, 2015 (<https://www.scribd.com/doc/290407508/Letting-the-Movement-Decide-FRIDA-Grantmaking-Report>)
- *Participatory Philanthropy: An overview* - Lani Evans, 2015 (<http://philanthropy.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Participatory-Philanthropy-Churchill.pdf>)
- *Funding Free Knowledge the Wiki Way: Wikimedia Foundation's Participatory Grantmaking* - The Lafayette Practice, 2015 (<https://www.scribd.com/document/273385607/Funding-Free-Knowledge-The-Wiki-Way-Wikimedia-Foundation-s-Participatory-Grantmaking>)
- *We Exist – Mapping LGBTQ Organising in West Africa* - Mariam Armisen, 2015 (no link)
- *Who Decides? How Participatory Grantmaking Benefits Donors, Communities and Movements* - The Lafayette Practice, 2014 (<https://www.scribd.com/document/273386784/Who-Decides-How-Participatory-Grantmaking-Benefits-Donors-Communities-and-Movements>)
- *Learning As We Go 1979–2012. The role of community philanthropy in progressive social change* - Dr. Avila Kilmurray, for The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, 2012 (no link)
- *Taking a Social Justice Approach to Community Development* - The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, 2011 (no link)

## Annexes

### Annex 1

#### What is participatory grantmaking, and why does it matter?

*“Participatory grantmaking is a way of addressing power imbalances that often arise in conventional funding practices. Instead of external donors or expert panels making decisions about who gets funded, that responsibility is shifted to members of the target constituency itself, who themselves are experts on their own communities, bringing deep knowledge, personal experience, and valuable insights to the process. Not only does participatory grantmaking disrupt the notion of the “passive beneficiary,” but it encourages a culture of peer-to-peer accountability for funding decisions made” [Grantcraft guide to Community Philanthropy, 2018<sup>10</sup>]*

Who is better placed to decide how to spend money on a particular issue? A funder, who may have commissioned research, developed expertise, had a track record of collaboration with civil society or other groups working on that issue, and will have an agreed institutional strategy? Or citizens, networks, others with direct, lived experience of the issue, or working directly with those that do? Conventional funding would lean towards the former, whereas participatory grantmaking leans towards the latter.

Philanthropy has long included elements of participation in its practices, and continues to experiment with participatory methods, from agenda-setting to grantee voice in decision-making, but examples of funders genuinely handing over control of funds to activists, for example, are much more rare. Philanthropy talks a lot about participation, but, says Cynthia Gibson in her recent paper on participatory philanthropy<sup>11</sup> for the Ford Foundation, “comparatively little commitment to integrating these practices into foundations’ strategies and activities, and especially their cultures, over the long term.” Some funders, like the UK-based Lankelly Chase Foundation, have made a deep commitment to rethinking their entire model and organisational structure,<sup>12</sup> and even investment-based funders are expanding out the range of grantees to include movements like cooperativism.<sup>13</sup> The Ariadne Network of European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights noted in their 2017 and 2018 Forecasts a growing interest among their members in participatory grantmaking.<sup>14</sup>

As successful examples of participatory grantmaking emerge, are documented, and shared with the field at large (see *Further Reading* section), this concept is beginning to become codified in a way that traditional grantmaking organisations can more readily read, understand and perhaps metabolise. With the publication of practical and accessible guides to implementing participatory grantmaking approaches, such as Cynthia Gibson’s recent GrantCraft guide<sup>15</sup> and associated resources<sup>16</sup> in 2018, this may spark a wave of new experiments inside curious but wary funding organisations. Paired with a wider understanding among funders of systems change,<sup>17</sup> this could see much wider implementation of participatory models.

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<sup>10</sup> See [https://cdn.givingcompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/25144146/Community\\_Philanthropy\\_paper.pdf](https://cdn.givingcompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/25144146/Community_Philanthropy_paper.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Gibson, Cynthia - *Participatory Grantmaking: Has its time come?* (Ford Foundation, 2017) ([https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/3599/participatory\\_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf](https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/3599/participatory_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf))

<sup>12</sup> <https://lankellychase.org.uk/our-approach/> AND <https://civilsocietyfutures.org/lankelly-chase/> AND <https://lankellychase.org.uk/systemic-working-in-place-how-we-got-here/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://medium.com/positive-returns/omidyar-network-expands-support-for-uk-focussed-governance-and-citizen-engagement-initiatives-2c8206c93d86>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.ariadne-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ariadne\\_2017Forecast.pdf](http://www.ariadne-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ariadne_2017Forecast.pdf) AND <http://www.ariadne-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ariadne2018Forecast.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.grantcraft.org/blog/why-every-funder-should-consider-participatory-grantmaking>

<sup>16</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <http://guerrillafoundation.org/why-we-do-what-we-do/>

## ECF – FUNDATION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

Participatory grantmaking also seems highly relevant to wider groups for a number of other reasons: it responds to an era in which citizens have, in some senses, greater power to communicate and organise, in which digitisation has radically upended industry after industry, leading to new forms of exchange and organisation, and in which established and legacy institutions of all kinds have experienced a huge erosion in trust, including philanthropy. Models like participatory grantmaking, despite the continued debates over how they function, offer a more collective, consensus-based approach to confronting complexity.

It is not without its challenges, as the findings that follow will demonstrate. Because it involves community building, shared decision making and collective deliberation, it can take time, and working in a democratic, participatory, inclusive way across more than 30 countries, with almost everyone working a shared language that might be their second, third or fourth language, can throw up a range of unanticipated frictions - but allowing for these and other teething issues, the participants in FundAction are positive and motivated in relation to the trajectory of the fund.

### Recent participatory funds of note

Many of those involved in FundAction report being aware of or involved in other participatory efforts, including the following funds and initiatives. Recent experiments and pilots have yielded learning about participatory grantmaking, from the FRIDA Fund<sup>18</sup>, the Edge Fund<sup>19</sup>, to the Red Umbrella Fund<sup>20</sup>. As yet, prominent examples of this approach remain few and far between, and the academic and grey literature covering this area is also relatively sparse. To read more about previous cases, please refer to the Annex, where we have reproduced short case studies from other recent reports.

A more direct antecedent of FundAction – in terms of its structure and mechanics particularly - is the Digital Rights Fund<sup>21</sup>, backed by the Open Society Foundations, and run by the Renewable Freedom Foundation<sup>22</sup> in Germany. More than 100 participating experts were drawn from the membership of the European Digital Rights Initiative<sup>23</sup>, or EDRI, an existing and long-standing grantee of OSF's Information Program. This model and its early lessons formed part of the early discussions being had by the four founding donors of FundAction.

Two other funding initiatives and networks fed into FundAction quite directly. The European Cultural Foundation had long been working in a participatory way, including giving the networks they supported “a high level of autonomy in spending money in beneficial ways.” Most specifically ECF ran a three-phase action research and networking programme called Connected Action for the Commons<sup>24</sup>, through which a number of the activists involved were onboarded. OSF's work to support activists in South and South-east Europe also surfaced calls from activists for a self-managed platform for activists to exchange and collaborate, including a specific one-page proposal from a Croatian group. (FPH's partners working on housing rights also contributed to this groundswell of support for the initial idea.)

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<sup>18</sup> <https://youngfeministfund.org/2017/07/talking-participatory-grantmaking-frida-efc-conference/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.edgefund.org.uk/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.redumbrellafund.org/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.digitalrights.fund>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.renewablefreedom.org/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.edri.org>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.culturalfoundation.eu/connected-action/>

## Annex 2

### FundAction: Key Facts and Figures

FundAction, as summarised in the evaluation plan, gives “grants for rapid response, systemic change and collaborative initiatives, distributed via a participatory decision-making model where members peer-review proposals.”

For a more in-depth description of how FundAction works, please see Annex 1, where we have reproduced the core documents describing its functioning.

#### **Founding donors:**

- European Cultural Foundation, Netherlands
- Charles Leopold Mayer Fondation pour le Progres de l’Homme, France/Switzerland
- Guerrilla Foundation, Germany
- Open Society Initiative for Europe, Spain

#### **Initial budget:**

€100,000 for 2017/18

In-kind donations of staff time, administrative costs, travel and venue costs

#### **Initial number of activists invited:**

45 [CONFIRM]

#### **Current number of participating activists:**

157 (August 2018)

#### **Number of participants at Annual Assembly 2018:**

60 [CONFIRM]

#### **Levels of online participation in password-protected Decidim platform:**

- Number of users registered
- Number of users with completed profile
- Number of users submitting projects in Round 1
- Number of users voting in Round 1
- Lowest and highest number of votes needed to secure a grant in Round 1
- Number of users submitting projects in Round 2
- Number of users voting in Round 2
- Lowest and highest number of votes needed to secure a grant in Round 2

#### **Social media and online audiences:**

- Public website
- Twitter
- Medium blog

## How FundAction works

FundAction's FAQ page explains how the fund is structured, and how to participate. We reproduce the contents of this page here for reference.

### What is Fundaction?

FundAction is a new participatory fund making grants for social transformation, organized around a community of activists based in Europe to support social movements working towards a transition to a just and equitable world.

Normally philanthropic money sits in an institution where staff and board members decide where to spend it. Participatory grantmaking seeks to involve those directly affected by the issues – the people that the money intends to help – in decision-making about where that money goes.

This is our webpage: [www.fundaction.eu](http://www.fundaction.eu)

This is our blog

### What is Fundaction's Online Assembly?

It's a decision-making platform where all the members can participate.

It's based on the decidim platform: an open code digital platform that can be used for different kinds of decision-making processes. Here you can find information if you're interested in using the platform for other purposes:

<https://decidim.org/>

### How can I participate?

Members can participate in different ways:

1. By applying for a grant
2. By taking part in the decision about how grants are distributed
3. By becoming a member of the P2P panel (this group of people has a specific role in the case of some kinds of grants)
4. By becoming a member of the [Facilitation Group](#)
5. By being active in our online community (e.g. commenting on proposals, writing for our blog, etc.)
6. By attending the annual (face to face) assembly

### Who can become a member?

Only activists based in Europe can become members, if they meet certain basic criteria. You can find them [here](#)

In addition, you need to receive an invite, because we want the platform to grow slowly. If you haven't been invited, you can send us a message expressing your interest in becoming part of FundAction [contact@fundaction.eu](mailto:contact@fundaction.eu)

### Why are there representatives of foundations at the online assembly?

These members are here just to see what happens in the assembly. We do this in order to be as transparent as possible regarding how the decisions about the use of the money are made. These members do neither have a voice nor a vote in grant-making. In addition, they have a profile like any other member, so everyone else can see who they are.

### Which kinds of grants does Fundaction offer and how often?

FundAction has three different types of grants:

\* Renew - Support for new initiatives and ideas that promote systemic change. Open to: Everyone / Funding up to: 20.000 € (launched in 2018)

\* Rethink Creating a European network and community through funds for collaboration, exchange and capacity building. Open to: Members / Funding up to: 5.000 € (launched Nov 2017)

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

\* Resist Rapid funding to respond to urgent actions. Open to: Members and non-members / Funding up to 2500 € (launched in 2018)

You can find more information here.

### **Does getting the grant on the online assembly mean that my project will necessarily get funded?**

Not necessarily. In order to receive the money you also need to meet the legal criteria and offer the documentation that you're asked for before you sign the contract.

### **How can I apply for a grant?**

First you need to register as a member (after receiving an invite)

After generating your profile you simply need to click on "Processes", and then just make a proposal by following the instructions.

### **How can I receive updates about what's happening on the online assembly?**

You need to activate notifications. In order to do this, just go to your account (click on your name on the top right corner of the webpage), then click on "notifications settings", and activate/deactivate them.

### **How can I receive updates about FundAction in general?**

You need to sign up for the newsletter here

### **What should I do if I have a question that is not answered here?**

You can click on "Processes" and choose a process called "Q&A". Then you can simply make a question (click on "new proposal"). Other members or admins will offer answers.

### **Can I report problems or make suggestions about how to improve the platform?**

Yes you can. You simply need to click on "Processes" and choose a process called "Feedback". There you can send your comments to the Facilitation Group.

### **Can I take part on my mobile phone?**

Yes you can.

### **What can I do if I have technical problems?**

You can send an email to [contact@fundaction.eu](mailto:contact@fundaction.eu)

### **What can I do if I see improper comments/proposals, or if I discover that some members don't share FundAction's values?**

You can (and should) flag the user by clicking on the flag icon next to their name. An admin will receive a message and deal with the case.

## Who can be a participant?

[Retrieved from [Who can become a FundAction activist? on the Decidim platform.](#)]

### Who can become a FundAction activist?

FundAction is an experiment in participatory grantmaking for which we are looking for people who are not afraid to take action and who drive positive social change in Europe.

FundAction is open to accept:

- \* emerging and experienced activists
- \* professionals and volunteers
- \* who are actively involved in progressive social movements
- \* at the grassroots level and/or in an organising capacity
- \* in a networking, interlinking or resource capacity
- \* at a personal level (it doesn't matter where you actually work)

FundAction members act as individuals on the platform, not as representatives of an organisation/movement/platform. But what does it mean?

\* If for example you work for an NGO or political party, you can still be a FundAction member and seek funding for the grassroots group or social movement that you are engaged with as a private individual.

\* But it's not enough to just work for a foundation, NGO or political party. To join FundAction, you should be actively engaged in it's activities at an individual level.

To join us in this collective experiment in participatory grantmaking, every member must:

- \* Subscribe to FundAction's values charter that can be downloaded [here](#)
- \* Be motivated and have the time to actively contribute to creating a counterexample to traditional philanthropy (yes, this means reading and discussing others' grant applications beyond your own)
- \* Trust in the process and FundAction's potential to be a learning tool for all of us

### Other limiting factors

Please be aware that, currently, members need to have a sufficient level of English in order to be able to participate in discussions, vote on proposals and apply for a grant - but you don't need to be perfectly fluent.

Finally, currently we cannot fund non-charitable entities or individuals. While we are working hard to address this challenge, members who do not have access to a charitable organisation as their fiscal sponsor (i.e. can accept a grant in their place), are currently unable to apply for a grant. However, they could join to comment and vote on others' proposals.

At this moment, eligible countries to receive grants are EU28, EFTA (Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Liechtenstein), Western Balkans (Serbia, BiH, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania), Ukraine, Moldova and Turkey.

## Types of grants

[Retrieved from [Types of grants](#) on the FundAction Decidim platform.]

### RETHINK

FundAction kicks off the participatory process with 'Rethink' grants. Rethink grants are for members of the FundAction platform to undertake exchange and capacity building activities. With Rethink, we hope to support the building of a pan-European network and community of activists through study visits, meetings for collaboration, trainings, translation, research, mentoring, etc. The emphasis is on supporting the ecosystem via opportunities for collaboration, rather than for specific projects.

Maximum amount: 5.000 EUR

Frequency: TBC, possibly quarterly

Launch: November 2017

### RENEW

The second grant type on the online assembly will be 'Renew' grants. Renew grants aim to fund projects working towards systemic change. Applicants should aim to tackle root causes via relevant leverage points with the aim of tipping a system. They shall oppose old patterns while actively contributing to new ones.

Maximum amount: 20.000 EUR

Frequency: Once per year

Launch: March 2018

Process: The Renew grants process takes place over two months, going through several stages

#### 1. Presentation of proposals

Members have until the 25th of February to submit proposals to the platform

#### 2. Screening of proposals

The Facilitation Group will take a week to screen all applications for basic eligibility

#### 3. Commenting & voting phase

Members have two weeks to questions and comment on proposals, and vote on their three favourites

#### 4. Shortlisting

The 10 proposals that get the most votes will move forward to the second stage

#### 5. Video Q&A

Over the following two weeks, a meeting between shortlisted applicants and a 'peer review panel' will take place online

#### 6. Peer review and feedback compilation

In the final days, the peer review panel will do any final research and summarise their thoughts for feedback purposes

#### 7. Decision making at La Bergerie

In 2018, the final decision will take place during an in-person meeting on Thursday 5 April

#### 8. Communication

Final grants will be announced to members soon afterwards, and grantees will begin communication with EDGE Funders Alliance to administer the grant

### RESIST

The final type of grants to be launched are the 'Resist' grants. Resist grants are for rapid response urgent action. These shall be focussed on grassroots/vulnerable/minority groups who are directly affected by a situation. The grant aims allow them to quickly mobilise and react to recent political developments or unforeseen events. It is not intended to go to larger organisations (approx. budget should be below 50k EUR) or activities that lack money due to bad planning or unsuccessful fundraising.

Maximum amount: TBC, likely 2.500 EUR

Frequency: Rolling basis throughout the year until budget is exhausted

Launch: Spring 2018

### Annex 3

#### Original Evaluation framing document

##### *Changes to evaluation process*

This is now deemed an assessment, rather than an evaluation, as an evaluation would imply a rigorous inquiry into decision-making, results and impacts. ECF and MacroScope agreed that the FundAction project is not at the stage of organisational development where its results can be subjected to this level of inquiry.

—————

FundAction is a participatory funding platform for and by activists in Europe, born out of conversations between civil society activists and four European foundations. FundAction supports progressive activism and social movements in Europe and it facilitates a pan-European community for learning, sharing and solidarity. Once fully operational, the fund will give grants for rapid response, systemic change and collaborative initiatives, distributed via a participatory decision-making model where members peer-review proposals.

##### Value based approach

The development of FundAction has been a participatory process on itself, in which both foundations as well as activists were involved. In this phase fundamental values have been embraced, which are outlined in a Charter of Values. The platform was shaped and will function according to these basic principles, and therefore these values are also the basis for the evaluation of the process and impact of FundAction.

##### Participatory evaluation

In line with the governance model and the participatory nature of FundAction this document - established by the facilitation group - only outlines the overall framework and general objectives of the fund. The specific objectives and measurables are to be defined by the grantees and other members of the fund.

##### The framework

FundAction aims to achieve impact on three different levels: (A.) the fund itself and its members; (B.) the philanthropic sector in Europe and beyond; and (C.) European society as a whole and specifically the activist communities. On each of these levels one objective has been formulated for each value defined in the Charter of Values: (1.) democracy; (2.) inclusivity; (3.) openness; (4.) mutual trust and respect; (5.) peer to peer; (6.) transparency; and (7.) autonomy. For each of these altogether 21 objectives, the framework provides measurables and also the sources of the information needed to check if the objective has been achieved.

#### **Interview Questions**

The original question list was derived from the original Evaluation plan shared in Annex 1. It was road tested as part of Phase 1 of this assessment, leading to a longer list of questions in Phase 2. Note that interviewees each answered a subset of the full Phase 2 question list.

##### *Phase 1 question list*

##### *For Facilitation Group members*

1. Did you feel you could participate in the decision making of FundAction?
2. How were members with diverse backgrounds were included in the decision making of FundAction?
3. Did you feel trusted and respected while engaging in FundAction and did you trust others?
4. Would you consider FundAction a peer learning environment?
5. Is FundAction transparent to the outside world and sharing enough information with the public?
6. Did external actors, such as funders, political parties or interest groups influence or interfere in funding decisions? If so, how?

##### *For funders*

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

1. Did you reach out with FundAction messaging to other funders? Please tell us which funders.
2. Has there been any cross-pollination of FundAction learning with other programmes in your foundation?

Specifically:

- has it caused colleagues to reconsider power dynamics in the donor/grantee relationship?
  - working with activists as peers and engagement in co-creating and sharing knowledge and learnings?
  - transparency, accessibility, and recognition of own failures.
3. Did you influence any funding discussions or decisions of FundAction?

### *Phase 2 question list*

1. How did you come to be involved in FundAction?
2. How did you understand the central idea of FundAction as you first encountered it?
3. How has FundAction evolved since you have been involved in it?
4. How well is FundAction functioning as a fund?
- 5-11. How well has FundAction represented its core values - democracy and participation, inclusivity, openness, mutual trust and respect, peer-to-peer, transparency, autonomy - in the various aspects of its work? (Membership, Facilitation Group, Assembly, online platform, decision-making, grantmaking)
12. What has been the quality of participation and decision-making in FundAction? How can these be improved or altered?
13. How involved - or not - have the founding donors been? What could the donors do, or have done, differently?
14. How well is the Facilitation Group functioning? What could be done differently or better?
15. What changes would you make to the ways that FundAction works at the moment?
16. How well is FundAction functioning as an environment for peer learning?
17. What should the future of FundAction be? (In terms of growth, membership, diversity, decision-making and other relevant parameters.)

## Survey questions

This survey was designed and sent out by Menno Weijs of the European Cultural Foundation in advance of the first Annual Assembly of FundAction in April 2018.

### Survey for members of FundAction

FundAction is a participatory funding platform for and by activists in Europe, born out of conversations between civil society activists and four European foundations. FundAction supports progressive activism and social movements in Europe and it facilitates a pan-European community for learning, sharing and solidarity.

You are a member of FundAction, meaning you created an account on the online platform we are using. Possibly you have applied for a grant or you commented and voted on proposals of others. Maybe you have been part of the development of FundAction. But it could also be you have created an account, but haven't done anything with it.

With the first Annual Assembly upcoming, we want to do a first assessment, to check if the systems we created for FundAction actually function and if we still work according to the values we have identified in the development phase.

Therefore, we would appreciate it very much if you want to participate in this survey. It will take you about 10 to 20 minutes. In order to present the first results of the survey at the Annual Assembly, please fill this form not later than April 3rd, at 12:00 CET.

1. What is your age group?

18-24

25-30

31-40

41-50

51-60

61-70

older than 70

prefer not to answer

2. What is your gender?

female

male

other, please specify:

prefer not to answer

3. Do you consider yourself as a cultural, social or ethnic minority or marginalised group in your local environment?

yes, feel free to specify:

no

4. Why are you member of FundAction?

I'm an activist

a represent a funder

other, please specify

5. Since when are you a member of FundAction?

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

- I was part of the development before the Seville Activist Encounter in December 2016
- I got involved because I was invited to the Seville Activist Encounter in December 2016
- I'm a member for more than 6 months
- I'm a member since between 3 to 6 months
- I became a member less than 3 months ago
- I don't remember

6. What is your general impression about FundAction?  
[open question]

7. How much have you been involved into FundAction so far?  
[scale 1 to 5], please specify:

8. To which extend did you feel included in the decision making of FundAction (e.g. about the distributon of grants)?  
[scale 1 to 5], please specify:

9. To which extend do you feel trusted and respected in your interactions with other members of FundAction?  
[scale 1 to 5], please specify:

10. To which extend do you trust and respect other members of FundAction?  
[scale 1 to 5], please specify:

11. To which extend do you consider FundAction as a peer learning environment?  
[scale 1 to 5], please specify:

12. Is there anything else you would like us to take into account for the initial assessment of FundAction?  
[open question]

Thank you!

## Phase 1 Report

### April 2018

Phase 1 of FundAction Assessment:

> Data on which this document is based:

11 names were provided by ECF, 7 were approached

2 x interviews with Facilitation Group members (1 did not respond)

2 x interview with participants (2 declined)

Survey of participants and other FundAction stakeholders by ECF (not yet received)

> Purpose of this document:

Capture high-level issues, questions, positives from interviewees, to feed into Assembly

Bring difficult or sensitive topics to surface for discussion in Assembly

Help guide Phase 2 of assessment

Responses have been anonymised and synthesised, except where a genuine outlier perspective was recorded, in which case it is highlighted as such.

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1. How FundAction was conceived, consulted on, and set up:

> Preceding concepts: one interviewee mentioned the value of the groundwork and consensus built through ECF's Connected Action for the Commons,

> Seville: praise for meeting process & hosting (esp for Zemos98); particular praise for prototyping method and process

> La Bergerie: praise for meeting & energy, and facilitating honesty of input/feedback; but concern at how long it took after this meeting to get the fund set up

> Establishment of Facilitation Group: thought to be a necessary structure by both FG and activists; quite informal/funder-driven initial selection of participants, and not clear why those people were chosen, what the nature of the mandate of the FG is, and how transparent this process was. Led to six months of "chaos" but it meant they genuinely had to work together to build a set of processes, rather than anyone owning them.

2. How well FundAction's processes run, both in terms of values (openness, diversity, transparency, inclusive, trust-based, respectful...) and of efficiency, from the perspective of the Facilitation Group (FG) and of the participants

> The FG:

Appreciated by both members and participants - there 'need to be rules and regulations' for the participation to work fairly, and to improve - "we are all learning in this respect"

The whole FG needs to be fully engaged, and its work needs to be more equitably and accountably managed - perception that roles are very gendered at the moment - one person suggested hiring a full-time coordinator for the FG, rather than asking one of the participant members of the FG to carry out what is a burdensome role

> The participants:

Perception that, although there is now a fair balance between men and women, in the early stages, men invited men, and women invited men too.

Need to find a way to encourage diversification of participants, for example people of colour, and those who don't work in and are not familiar with institutional civil society

Perception that a good proportion of "active, interesting, important and vocal" activists in Europe are now involved, but that the key is to reach out beyond. Many of them know each other - which is a "good sign, as we are more networked in Europe than we were 5 years ago."

Perception that 10-20% of people are active, and that majority of these are women, in commenting on others' proposals - one interviewee noted that it was the first time they had been "in the position of choosing, which I liked".

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

3 interviewees mentioned the potential problem of 'lobbying' or cliques of participants who know each other - if this were diluted by involving more people, however, this would risk diluting the feeling of community

> The processes:

the processes and the website were felt by all to be well-designed in that they are extremely easy to use and intuitive, and in accessible language. This opens up possibilities to activists and organisations that have little experience of fundseeking

The processes could be made more accessible and attractive to participants both in terms of more languages, and of assumptions about access to technology, or even awareness about what grant funding is.

More discussion needed on how to make the fund genuinely participatory - "we need specialised external expertise to do this in the same way we need expert lawyers" - in order to improve the quality of decision-making

It was felt to be important that applicants didn't have to be a formal group to apply for funds - indeed one interviewee drew parallels with their organisation's own start with a similar grant.

Commenting on proposals has been valuable & a helpful learning process, but half of members are not engaged yet. "With a traditional fund you get a notification - yes or no - but here, I learned something about my own idea, got something more. We're trying to help each other, not just compete."

Some elements need review, such as the number of votes given to participants in the voting process - a higher or lower number of votes provides different incentives to the voter, so working out what the right level is important. Also a suggestion that instead of deciding the first round of grants purely on the number of votes received, there should be a review panel, as in the second round of larger grants.

Finally, one interviewee suggested that the grantees should be given support to connect with each other, and additional funds to be able to meet in person at least once a year to have a deep-dive exchange

3. How the original concept has evolved, & if this is in line with the original values

> "Structurally the same as the traditional set-up - donors give the money and the activists compete for it - but in this case, the activists have more voice (based on their own direct experiences), & to meet the needs that activists and groups and networks organisations have." Another interviewee suggested that if it doesn't develop into a more substantial and more participatory fund, "grantmaking will never change."

> "Crucial that the funds that allow organisations not only to run activities, but also to think differently, have the space to think - caught in the cycle of doing the same things over and again, and wondering why it is not working..."

> "The way it has been set up and developing is really open, and gives people a lot of power - even if it is not a lot of money, and the projects are still small, if we make it work & people feel they can shape it, it can become big - it has a lot of potential, but people need time to engage."

> Some activists would not ordinarily go near foundation funding, but the pooled & participatory nature of FundAction has made it easier to convince some of them to apply. Others have objections to taking any funds at all, as they believe that their work should be voluntary.

> Three of the interviewees wanted to communicate that it is important to ensure that the fund is supporting the more imaginative and radical ideas, e.g. stepping outside current system's logic, or are explicitly anti-capitalist, or are riskier and not just "safety-first" - otherwise "how are we going to get out of the multiple dilemmas we are in". One interviewee suggested that some of the voting and decision-making reflected

> The FG and the Fund are intricately intertwined - the course of the Fund depends on the composition of the FG, and although fairly diverse, most of the FG are not from grassroots backgrounds, so it has "focused more on logistics than legitimacy" - this is the "glory as well as the challenge"

4. What the influence of the funders has been on the shape & nature of the fund thus far

> consensus that "if the funders had built it alone, it would look different - and if the activists had built it alone it would look radically different." Compromise has been important, and the shared decision-making has led to a different kind of legitimacy.

> "I [originally] didn't believe that the funders wanted to give up control over who gets grants, but that is not the case. We're far from where we should be to be truly participatory, but we are on the right path." Another

## ECF – FUNDACTION – FINAL REPORT V2 – NOV 2018

interviewee put it more pointedly: “The funders need to be not just decentralising the labour of decision-making, but also the power [i.e. more of the money]. That is the ultimate success of the platform.”

> One interviewee felt that the participants were harder on and more critical of applications than donors might have been - “with the zeal of religious converts”. This might be, suggested the interviewee, because “They’ve never done this before, and they are remembering the things that have been done to them by donors.”

> Three interviewees expressed surprise that the fund had not been backed with more solid funding by the donors, and that one of the donors had provided only in-kind support rather than actual funds. One put it as “OSF seed-funding and then stepping back - expecting financial sustainability

> This was balanced with an appreciation that the programme officers/managers directly involved have been “a godsend” (one was described as being more radical than the activists during the prototyping process - as they wanted to “break free from the grantmaking process”), and that interviewees did not know “what they had to navigate internally to get even this amount of money committed.”

### 5. Burning issues that need to be brought out in the context of the Assembly

#### > Gender

FG: as noted earlier, those interviewed felt that the (paid) work of the FG fell into traditional gender roles, and that this needs open discussion at the Assembly, and to be addressed pre-emptively for the next group forming the FG.

#### > Accountability of the Fund and of the FG in particular

Should meeting agendas, notes, action points and/or decisions be made open to the whole community?

What happens if someone can't or doesn't deliver what they were supposed to

#### > Diversity, including reaching hard-to-reach groups

#### > Donors

Why such little money, especially from wealthy foundations like OSF and FPH?

### 6. What should the rest of the assessment focus on, and what should a future evaluation look to examine, and when should this take place?

> A full evaluation should not take place until a full cycle of projects has been funded and had time to gain results - perhaps in early to mid-2019.