

POP  
CULTURE  
COLLAB

# #MakingJusticePop

The Story of the  
Pop Culture Collaborative's  
Impact at 5 Years

The **Pop Culture Collaborative** is a donor collaborative unleashing the power and scale of pop culture to transform the narrative landscape around people of color, immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and Native people—particularly those who are women, queer, transgender, and/or disabled—through grantmaking, convening, narrative strategy, and research.

Five years ago, a visionary and courageous group of philanthropists, artists, organizers, and culture change strategists embarked on a journey to unleash the power of pop culture to advance social justice and narrative change across America.

Since then, the pop culture for social change field has expanded and coalesced, a groundbreaking narrative systems strategy has been developed and tested—reaching over 100 million Americans—and Pop Culture Collaborative grantees have been responsible for many of the most transformational and visible cultural advances made by social justice movements.

# This is their story.

## INTRODUCTION

# Pop Culture Unleashes Narrative Power

**In the tumultuous times of 2020, the Pop Culture Collaborative issued the following call to action:**

Throughout American history, the most transformative cultural shifts—from slavery abolition to Reconstruction, “I Have A Dream” to “Yes We Can,” #BlackLivesMatter, the DREAM-ers, and Love Is Love—have been achieved by movements and leaders who have awakened people’s deep yearning to belong in a pluralist America. In each case, the tug-of-war between belonging and exclusion sparked a portal moment—a cracking open of the public imagination about what this nation is capable of becoming.

The Pop Culture Collaborative recognizes that our nation is on the precipice of another historic breakthrough: a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the American people to decisively choose to co-create the just systems and pluralist culture we need to survive and thrive. How will we respond to this call for transformation? Will we submit to White Nationalist, authoritarian narratives that beckon us to retreat back into the systems of exclusion and violence that stain our nation’s past, or will we boldly step through the portal and onto the path towards the just and pluralist future so many of us yearn for?

The Pop Culture Collaborative’s impact over the past five years offers a clear answer: its vision, strategy, tools, and community are ready to lead the bold and sweeping cultural transformation that is necessary. In just five years, the Collaborative scaffolded, resourced, and nurtured the pop culture for social change field from the ground up, and tested a powerhouse set of strategies during multiple portal moments in 2020 and 2021 that are now ready to scale. And, through the Collaborative’s stewardship, this vibrant community of social justice, entertainment, and philanthropic leaders know that we will only succeed if we work together with a fierce embrace of joy and abundant thinking.

Pop culture is the most influential arena in which people make meaning in the world. The Pop Culture Collaborative and the field it supports are among the first to build a robust strategy based on this fact, and make the case that pop culture narrative change investments must be equal to and coordinated with the other essential strategies of organizing and policy change. By researching a range of culture change processes, from marriage equality to the normalization of bottled water, the Collaborative, its grantees, and Senior Fellows have found that the surround sound experience of pop culture content—the immersive stories that flow through TV, movies, social media, music, books, sports, journalism, and more—can dramatically accelerate the pace of change. “If we who believe in justice do not engage these strategies, others will,” writes the Collaborative. In reality, authoritarian movements in the U.S. already are investing billions of dollars in pop culture and narrative change. There is no time to lose. Philanthropy must invest in and grow this field to leverage this powerful strategy for change.

# Unprecedented Growth and Impact

The Collaborative's impressive impact to date can be understood on at least three levels: 1) its visionary and disciplined approach to building the pop culture for social change field; 2) its effect on the American narrative landscape; and 3) the dramatic increase in philanthropic focus and investments in the pop culture for social change field.

## **1 | The Collaborative implemented a visionary approach to field-building.**

Building a field requires establishing shared concepts, developing tools and methodologies, and prototyping and testing. It also requires co-creation, trust building, and community building. Prior to the Collaborative's efforts, people and projects were often siloed and/or isolated and unable to make scalable impact. Through a rigorous process of co-creation, the Collaborative has introduced and socialized a groundbreaking narrative systems framework and network organizing approach. They then tested and validated these strategies through the launch of the first cycle of the Becoming America Fund, whose 50+ projects ultimately reached over 100 million people.

## **2 | The Collaborative's grantees and partners have accelerated the pace of change.**

The impact the Collaborative's grantees and partners have had on the narrative and cultural landscape of the U.S. in a short time period is impressive. In its first five years, the Collaborative steadily invested in path-breaking leaders like Ai-jen Poo of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and Rashad Robinson of Color of Change, who—with long-term, holistic support—have proven that large-scale, transformational narrative change is possible. In other cases, the Collaborative invested critical seed funding that helped catapult cultural strategists like Crystal Echo Hawk of IllumiNative onto the frontlines of field innovation. Together, these grantees expanded understanding of what pop culture narrative change strategies could yield, from NDWA's work to position care as part of national infrastructure, to IllumiNative's Native-led work to pressure the Washington football team to change its name.

## **3 | The Collaborative dramatically expanded philanthropic support for this field.**

The Collaborative successfully raised more than \$25 million in less than five years, surpassing the goal set by its initial founders, and made upwards of 200 grants, ranging from \$10,000 to \$200,000, in rapid response, project-based, and long-term general operating grants. Furthermore, Managing Partners, including Unbound Philanthropy, Ford Foundation, General Service Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, have adopted pop culture narrative change grantmaking as a critical pillar of their theories of change, and accordingly, have increased their investments to the Pop Culture Collaborative and the greater pop culture for social change field.

“The Pop Culture Collaborative has created more possibility for transformation than most people thought was possible.

- Taryn Higashi  
Unbound Philanthropy  
Pop Culture Collaborative Managing Partner



**The Pop Culture Collaborative  
and the pop culture for social change field  
have arrived, and are ready to help us step boldly  
into the just and pluralist future we yearn for.**

This report seeks to share the Collaborative’s “greatest hits” of the last five years, scratching the surface of the sophistication, creativity, and depth of thought, evidence, and strategy that underpins the work. For those who are already part of the Collaborative community, may this be a reminder and celebration of your extraordinary accomplishments. For those who are being introduced to the Collaborative for the first time, may this be an invitation to dig into the innovative strategies, learnings, and impact that the Collaborative has produced so far—and the incredible promise of the work that lies ahead.

Let’s dive in.

## THE ORIGIN STORY

# Narrative Change Becomes Essential

**The Pop Culture Collaborative was founded in October 2016 by a network of philanthropic leaders—primarily BIPOC, women, and/or queer people**—led by Unbound Philanthropy, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, who dared to imagine what might be possible if they expanded the impact of their investments by pooling their resources, strategic thinking, and leadership to dramatically increase philanthropic investment in the pop culture for social change field.

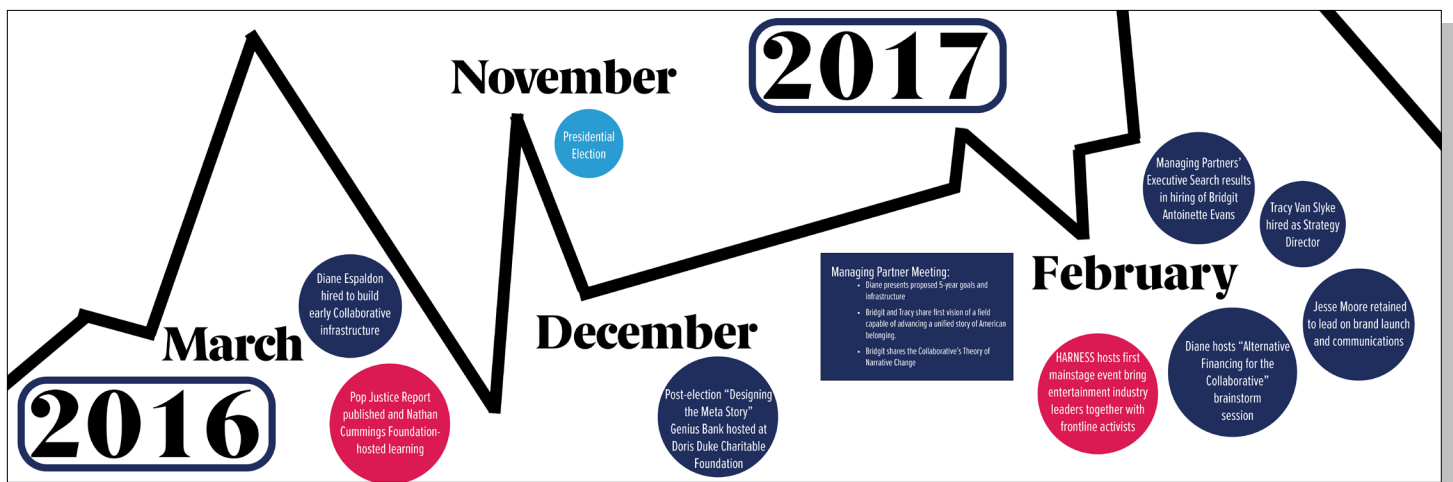
These funders, along with other philanthropic leaders, were early supporters of culture change projects, from films to music videos, web series, TV storylines, and creative campaigns. They recognized that while these initiatives were often innovative and timely, they usually lacked the infrastructure, networks, and financial support required to reach the scale needed to create palpable and enduring change in the beliefs and behaviors of millions of people.

Building on recommendations provided by the groundbreaking “Pop Justice” report produced by former entertainment executive Liz Manne, the Pop Culture Collaborative launched in the Fall of 2016 as a multi-year, multi-million dollar philanthropic fund and funder learning community. Notably, its founding occurred in the month prior to the 2016 election: a campaign fueled by toxic narratives that resonated with half of the electorate. This sparked an even more intense call to action, given the leading role that narrative and pop culture strategies had played in that election. Funders and field practitioners recognized that organizing and policy change would not be enough; only by investing in strategies designed to reimagine systems and transform culture could widespread and lasting social change be achieved.

“ Dreaming new futures couldn’t be more important right now. No one has to figure it out on their own. We can participate together in the experimentation and build a shared body of knowledge.

- Dimple Abichandani  
General Services Foundation  
Managing Partner

[Go here](#) to see the initial Milestones of the Pop Culture Collaborative Community.



## THE VISIONARIES

# Creating a Home for Innovation



### LISTEN

To experience Bridgit and Tracy's dynamic partnership in action, listen to their [WONDERLAND podcast](#) on your favorite audio platform.

The Pop Culture Collaborative's vision and impact have been led by [Bridgit Antoinette Evans, CEO, and Tracy Van Slyke, Chief Strategy Officer](#). Each brings the depth, breadth, and savvy of seasoned cultural strategists as well as the creativity, experimentation, and innovation of artists and mediamakers.

**Bridgit** is a thought leader and innovator in the design of pop culture narrative systems that are transforming America's cultural landscape. Her philanthropic leadership builds on nearly 20 years as an award-winning artist, culture change strategy designer, and advisor to entertainment artists, movement leaders, and philanthropies working to shift narratives around the genocide in Darfur, human trafficking, climate change, marriage equality, criminal justice, the care economy, and immigrant rights.

**Tracy** is a thought leader and field-builder who has worked with content producers, journalists, artists, social justice organizers, and philanthropic leaders for more than 20 years to analyze and evolve mass media ecosystems and help develop profound storytelling and audience experiences that catalyze mass audiences for social change.

Together, they have created a generous and experimental home for innovation for stakeholders across social justice, culture change, philanthropy and entertainment, designing the vision and strategy of the Collaborative to be as rigorous and audacious as the work demands. Under their leadership, the Pop Culture Collaborative has introduced and defined guiding concepts, activated a Theory of Narrative Change, designed a groundbreaking narrative system, invested in cutting-edge research, and operationalized an innovative grantmaking strategy that has built a field that has reached over 100 million people to date.

## MANAGING PARTNERS

The Pop Culture Collaborative currently has 12 Managing Partners who provide general operating support and governance oversight. The Collaborative is also supported by project-based donors, including contributors to the Becoming America Fund and the Gender Justice Narrative Cohort.



## STRATEGIC PIVOTS & DEFINITIONS

# Imagining Beyond Inclusion

Prior to the Pop Culture Collaborative, there were isolated examples of culture change projects reaching mass audiences, but the field was not coordinated to create transformational narrative change at scale. In Hollywood, efforts to “diversify” were limited to DEI hiring programs. **Over its first two years, the Collaborative advanced three strategic pivots that focused its grantmaking strategy, as well as that of its Managing Partners and the larger philanthropic community, on the goal of building narrative power.**

### FROM INCLUSION TO INNOVATION

The Collaborative established that its best role was not to invest in reforms (for example “fixing” existing DEI programs) but instead to identify the barriers preventing BIPOC, women, trans, queer, Muslim, and disabled artists from expressing leadership, building power, and innovating to create something new in Hollywood. By listening to grantees and partners, the Collaborative came to understand that they are uniquely positioned to invest in new tools, networks, pipelines, and storytelling methods that expand opportunity—and power—for truly diverse creative communities.

### FROM MEDIUM TO MASS AUDIENCES

Recognizing that many early culture change projects, while powerful, were not reaching enough people, the Collaborative intervened as a “laboratory” to test methods to bring social justice–informed narratives and stories to mass audiences. With this in mind, the Collaborative requires funded content-focused projects to have the goal of reaching an audience of at least one million people, or to develop networks or tools to more reliably reach this scale.

### FROM STORIES TO SYSTEMS

Just after the 2016 election, the Collaborative convened leading cultural strategists who identified an urgent narrative challenge: the lack of a soulful, unifying story of America’s future rooted in a culture of belonging. The Collaborative then asked: How can we meet this challenge in the next five years? Funding one-off pieces of content wouldn’t be enough, nor could they take a generalist approach to funding; they needed to become laser-focused in their grantmaking, and embarked on a learning journey to understand how to hone this approach.

They began by studying a range of culture change processes, from the Civil Rights era and marriage equality to the proliferation of bottled water and minivans. They discovered that most often, **narrative systems**—coordinated stories that carry transformative ideas (mental models and narrative archetypes) through pop culture content and experiences in ways that constantly reinforce and ultimately normalize behaviors and values—accelerate the pace of change. **This set the stage for the research, concept development, and strategy design that now guides the Collaborative’s work.**



### RESOURCE

[Download this grantmaking strategy resource](#), Cross-Sector Collaboration, and others on the Pop Culture Collaborative website.

## DEFINING THE TERMS

The Collaborative also set out to define key terms in order to establish a shared understanding across staff, Managing Partners, Senior Fellows, grantees, and cohort members. These definitions include:

- > Pop Culture
- > The Field
- > Cultural Strategy
- > Culture Change Strategy
- > Narrative (Narrative Archetype)
- > Narrative System
- > Narrative Network

### RESOURCE

Go here to use and reference these definitions.

# Building Yearning for Pluralist Culture

With an initial vision for an American future “rooted in a culture of belonging,” the Collaborative sought to better understand and articulate what this means in the context of America’s history of democracy and other concepts of inclusion, participation, and identity. What is it that millions of people across many generations truly yearn for?

**The Collaborative identified a “pluralist culture” as the North Star of the Collaborative’s work.** “If just systems are the ones of a healthy democracy,” explains CEO Bridgit Antoinette Evans, “pluralist culture is its heartbeat, breath, and muscles. One cannot thrive without the other.”

It is important to note that these ideas and ways of being were developed over thousands of years. Evans explains: “Pluralist culture is the social innovation of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island and around the world. As indigeneity became diasporic—moving across the globe due to voluntary migration, forced displacement, human trafficking, and the slave trade—pluralist culture has also moved. But as it spread, a range of politicians, academics, social scientists, and brand marketers have colonized this innovation, claiming, suppressing, or diffusing its complexity.” The Pop Culture Collaborative and its community have worked to restore the stewardship of pluralist world building to BIPOC people whose ancestors gave birth to these methodologies of belonging, re-centering justice and anti-racist, anti-misogynist accountability at the heart of pluralist culture.

**With pluralist culture as the North Star, the Collaborative refined its vision to be more precise and audacious to meet the challenges the country faces.**

## Pluralist Culture:

A cultural condition in which the majority of people in a community or society are actively engaged in the hard and delicate work of belonging together in a just society.

– Pop Culture Collaborative, 2018

## The Goal:

In the long term, the Collaborative is working to support the growth of a pop culture for social change field **capable of building the yearning in most Americans** (more than 150 million people) to actively co-create a just and pluralist society in which everyone is perceived to belong—inherently—and treated as such.



# A Strategy to Move Millions

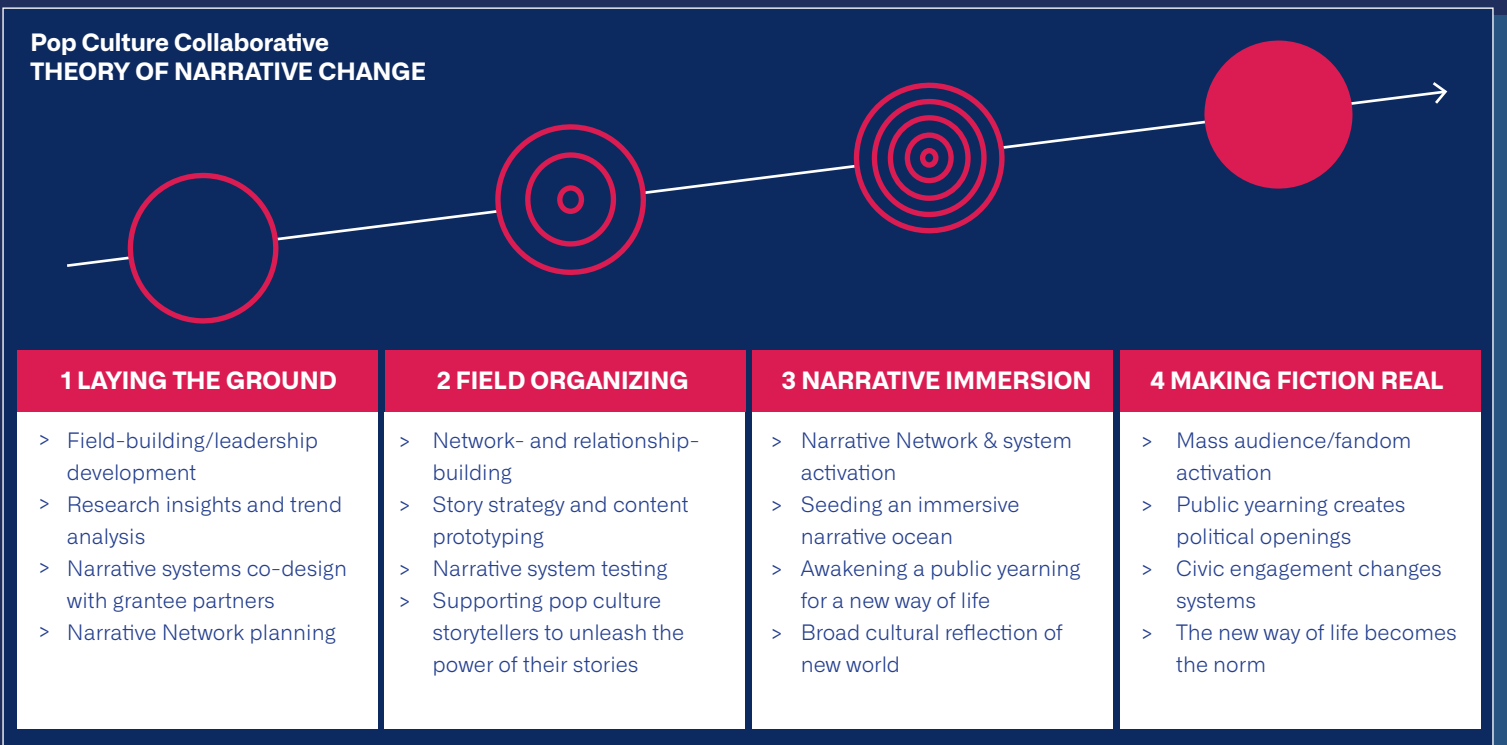
The Pop Culture Collaborative was the first philanthropic team to operationalize a holistic grantmaking and field-building strategy to resource a narrative change field capable of routinely moving 150+ million people. To achieve this goal, the Collaborative adapted the Stories as Solutions Theory of Culture Change—first authored by Bridgit Antoinette Evans, Ryan Senser, and Ai-jen Poo. This theory outlines a process whereby a narrative ocean of pop culture stories—created by primarily BIPOC, immigrant, Muslim, and Indigenous artists, especially those who are women, queer, trans, non-binary, and/or disabled—gradually awakens

widespread public yearning for a new way of life, and ultimately, majoritarian demand for the pluralist culture and just systems needed to make fiction real.

This Theory of Narrative Change has guided the Collaborative’s investments and grantmaking strategy over the last five years; the organization is now in Phase 3: Narrative Immersion. The following pages outline the impact of these phases to date and set the stage for what’s next.

[Learn more about the Collaborative’s Theory.](#)

**RESOURCE**



## TIMELINE

### 2017-2019

Funded field leaders and core capacity to strengthen existing efforts. Invested in convening, cultural research, experimental pipelines, and mass audience activation strategies to build new infrastructure. Adopted Theory of Narrative Change and prototyped a groundbreaking narrative system. (see pages 9-10)

### 2018-2020

Forged networks and catalyzed partnerships, in order to cultivate the will and infrastructure needed to achieve “radical coordination” across the field. Supported artists to unleash the power of their voices and activism. Tested story strategy and narrative system. (see pages 11 - 15)

### 2020 - 2025

The Becoming America Fund resources the field to seed new narrative oceans of pop culture content and experiences using a narrative systems framework, enabling grantees to meet numerous portal moments—from the COVID-19 pandemic to presidential elections—with greater connectivity and collaboration. (see pages 16-18)

### 2025 and Beyond

The field helps millions of people, driven by their newfound yearning for pluralist culture, to step into a new way of life. Movements offer structural solutions that enable people to make the fictional society they now yearn for real. To transform yearning into lived reality for 150 million or more Americans, a significant scaling of financial resources is invested. (see pages 19-21)

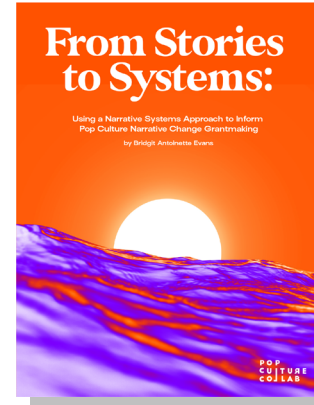


# New Narrative System Changes the Game

**With the powerful pivot from stories to systems, the Collaborative developed a groundbreaking narrative system design that articulates a theory of how new narrative environments can take shape in mass culture.** This approach outlines a process of activating a coordinated system of mental models (foundational ideas about how the world works), narrative archetypes (stories that people know and believe to be real), behaviors, and stories designed to shift how people think, feel, and behave in the world.

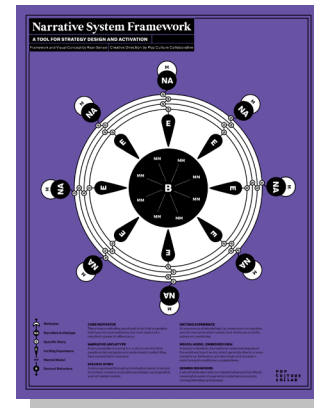
In order to activate a narrative system, a coordinated, cross-sector group of field practitioners aligned around a shared culture change goal and strategy—a narrative network—must be resourced to work together in “radical coordination.” Over time, this network will prototype content and other experiences that will seed a narrative ocean for specific audiences, one that constantly reinforces and reflects the ideas and behaviors at the heart of the narrative system.

The Collaborative is now employing this narrative system and narrative network design to normalize pluralist mental models and behaviors in audiences of millions of people through the Becoming America Fund, which you can read more about on pages 16-17.



## RESOURCES

From Stories to Systems: Using a Narrative Systems Approach to Inform Pop Culture Narrative Change Grantmaking, by CEO Bridgit Antoinette Evans, documents the Collaborative’s approach to large-scale narrative change.



The Narrative System Framework and how it works can be found in From Stories to Systems. [Go here](#) to request a copy of the report.



To activate a narrative system, a narrative network must be resourced. This image provides an overview of the narrative network being activated by the Collaborative. [Go here](#) to see more.

“ I am bursting with inspiration, thoughts, and questions about the framework and how I can start to infuse some of the proposed core ideas into my work.

- Entertain Change 2018 Participant



# Cutting-Edge Research Drives Insights

To lay the ground, the Collaborative invested in innovative culture change research to uncover data, develop analysis, and create actionable insights to inform and activate its narrative change strategy. This includes audience research such as the [You Are What You Watch](#) (grantee partner: [futurePerfect Lab](#)) report that correlates people's ideologies with their television watching, a better predictor of voting than opinion and voter polling; and industry research such as [Behind the Scenes](#), (grantee partner: [Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity](#)), a first-of-its-kind report authored by BIPOC, women, queer, and/or disabled television writers documenting systemic injustice inside writers rooms.

The Collaborative also supported three phases of path-breaking research to understand the motivational drivers of both pluralist and toxic behaviors, and the life journeys and cultural experiences that can encourage resilient pluralist identity formation.

From this research, Jeff Yang of [Metafo.re](#) recommended a more intensive focus on two segments of “middle ground” individuals who could swing from pluralist to non-pluralist. Further findings will guide the next phase of the Becoming America Fund and future grantmaking focused on cultivating pluralist identity through digital culture and fandoms.

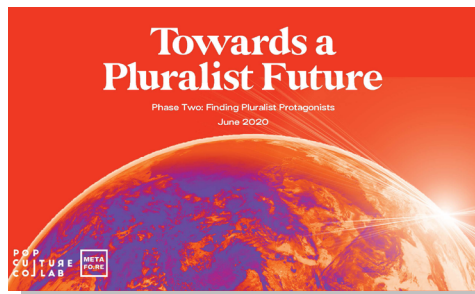
## RESOURCES

[Go here](#) to request a copy of these reports.



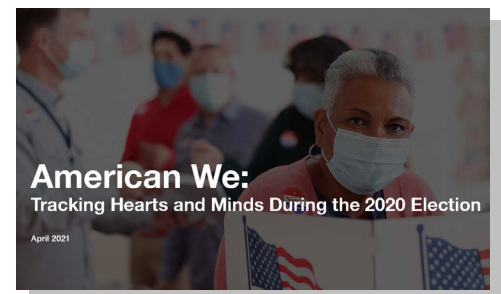
### Towards a Pluralist Future, Phase 1

Led by Jeff Yang, the cultural analytics teams at [Sparks & Honey](#) and [Metafo.re](#) studied the behavioral continuum from toxic polarization to pluralist community in digital spaces, with a focus on fandoms as a laboratory for civil society.



### Towards a Pluralist Future, Phase 2

Translating the findings from Phase 1, grantee [MetaFo.re](#) created a framework and survey to identify pluralists in our broader society, and quantitatively and qualitatively explore the life events, and pop culture content that drives people to embrace a pluralist worldview.



### Phase 3 - American We Project

Finally, [Metafo.re](#) conducted a 14-week online panel of 45 people on the continuum from pluralist to non-pluralist to test ways to motivate people to move along that path towards pluralist behaviors and worldview.

## BREAK THE STORY

The Pop Culture Collaborative produces an online magazine that curates interviews, opinion pieces, and articles offering bold ideas, big questions, and critical insights from storytellers, strategists, movement visionaries, and philanthropic leaders at the intersection of pop culture and social justice.

- > [Volume 1: Imagining a Future Beyond White Supremacy](#)
- > [Volume 2: Recentering Power](#)
- > [Volume 3: Remaking Television](#)
- > [Volume 4: Disability Visibility](#)



EXPLORE

[Go to the Pop Culture Collaborative website](#) to explore these bold ideas.



# Fresh Grantmaking Approach Builds the Field

**Over its first five years, the Collaborative has invested over \$19 million through nearly 200 grants to build the pop culture for social change field's infrastructure, and organized a network of more than 300 partners from entertainment and social justice, including studios, production companies, and talent agencies.**

Grants are awarded to nonprofit organizations, for-profit companies, and individuals working to drive transformative experiences for mass audiences (more than 1 million people) and range from \$5K for small experimental projects to \$200K for multi-year culture change programs, with rapid response options to respond to an acute and timely political or culture moment.

Through these investments, the Collaborative also holistically funds the growth of narrative ecosystems and infrastructure that centers specific communities and issues. These issue-specific investments transform the narrative ocean, building towards a just and pluralist culture and, in turn, a pluralist narrative environment more swiftly advances the narrative change goals of these communities. To see what this looks like in practice, explore grants made in each of these areas, as well as the video on the Collaborative's racial justice grantmaking below.

- > [Racial Justice Narratives](#)
- > [Disability Rights Narratives](#)
- > [Gender Justice Narratives](#)
- > [Immigrant Rights Narratives](#)
- > [Indigenous Narratives](#)
- > [Muslim Narratives](#)
- > [Trans Futurist Narratives](#)

To build narrative infrastructure, the Collaborative funds in these four priority areas:

## 1 | ARTISTS ADVANCING CULTURE CHANGE

Supporting artists and/or artist cohorts from various disciplines, geographies, and industries to bring their creative work to mass audiences, while also contributing to field-wide efforts to build public yearning for a just and pluralist America. Explore grantees [here](#).

## 2 | MOVEMENT-LED POP CULTURE NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Supporting social justice organizations and initiatives that are designing, coordinating, and activating long-term narrative change strategies at the pop culture level. Explore grantees [here](#).

## 3 | CULTURE CHANGE RESEARCH AND LEARNING

Supporting projects that uncover data, develop analysis, and/or share insights with and among entertainment, social justice, and philanthropic sectors in order to inform narrative design, advance cultural strategy, and activate more collaborators in the pop culture for social change field. Explore grantees [here](#).

## 4 | BUILDING THE POP CULTURE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE FIELD

Supporting experimental programs, projects and technologies that foster a robust and powerful pop culture change field, anchored by a diverse network of leading creatives, practitioners, and strategists within the entertainment, social justice and philanthropic fields. Explore grantees [here](#). Read the most recent evaluation of the Collaborative's grantmaking [here](#).



## ECOSYSTEM INVESTMENTS: RACIAL JUSTICE

The Pop Culture Collaborative takes an ecosystem approach, leveraging grantmaking, convening, and network-building strategies to center the innovation and expand the capacity of BIPOC-led narrative change organizations, companies, and teams, funding initiatives that:

- > Cultivate the public voice of racial justice organizers and artists;
- > Establish new pipelines for artists to create authentic content;
- > Produce reports that expose inequities in Hollywood;
- > Conduct research that unearths new audience insights;
- > Support artists to advocate for justice in their industries; and
- > Finance content that builds yearning for a pluralist America.



**WATCH**

See our holistic approach at work in our [racial justice grants portfolio video](#).



# Investments Supercharge Pathbreaking Leaders

While the pop culture for social change field has rapidly expanded over the past five years, some social justice organizations have centered narrative change strategy for over a decade. Their commitment has paid off with transformational political and cultural advances, and they continue to provide lessons for the entire field. But despite their successes, these leaders are still challenged to raise major funds specifically to support their narrative change programs. **The Pop Culture Collaborative has bolstered these organizations with multi-year, core support for their culture change strategies, contributing to major wins over the last five years.** Examples include:

- > The [National Domestic Workers Alliance](#) and [Caring Across Generations](#) have made ‘care Infrastructure’ a national conversation, positioning the labor of domestic workers—the majority women, women of color and immigrants—as essential human infrastructure that should be resourced alongside traditional physical infrastructure like roads and bridges. This win is a product of years of investing in narrative change strategies, as well as developing major partnerships and audience campaigns around major motion pictures such as *The Help* and *Roma*.
- > [Color of Change](#) remains at the forefront of efforts to build the narrative power of Black people to confront injustice in the criminal, legal, policing, mass incarceration, immigration, and healthcare systems. Through thought leadership, digital campaigning, pop culture content production, Hollywood and tech industry research, and showrunner/celebrity organizing, the organization has repositioned racial justice as a unifying issue that can mobilize mass audiences to shift behaviors and advocate for structural change.

## INVESTING IN GENDER JUSTICE LEADERSHIP + NARRATIVE POWER

Since the Collaborative’s inception, it has prioritized investments in the leadership of BIPOC women working at the intersection of pop culture, narrative change, and gender justice, including **Ai-jen Poo** of the National Domestic Workers Alliance; **Tracy Sturdivant** of The League; and **America Ferrera**, co-founder of Harness.

The impact of these multi-sector investments became clear when, in 2017, Ferrera emerged as a leader of one of the largest artist-led movements in Hollywood: the Time’s Up campaign, which responded to pervasive sexual harassment and abuse in the industry. When activist **Monica Ramirez** and her community of migrant farmworkers penned a letter drawing the connections between their experiences and those of survivors in Hollywood, Ferrera quickly evolved the vision and purpose of this new initiative. And when MeToo movement founder **Tarana Burke** was invited to the 2018 Golden Globes, she insisted that other gender justice leaders be included.

It was in this context that the Collaborative supported Poo, Ramirez, and Burke to maximize this global attention. From organizing PR experts to provide media training in preparation for the activists’ red carpet appearances, to funding The League to produce a digital campaign that helped focus the awards night press coverage on the activists and their issues, the Collaborative and its network unleashed the potential of this moment.

Since then, the Collaborative has awarded core support and/or project grants to Poo, Ferrera, Burke, Ramirez, Sturdivant, and other gender justice leaders to ensure they are able to build on this incredible momentum. The Collaborative is now investing in the long-term infrastructure of the gender justice narrative field, including seeding the design of a gender justice narrative cohort and an artist-led gender justice entertainment hub.

### RESOURCES

[Download case studies](#) on how the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Color of Change are transforming narratives in pop culture on the Pop Culture Collaborative website.





# Bold Support Expands Narrative Power

**The Collaborative has successfully seeded a powerful narrative infrastructure that did not exist five years ago.**

## FOREFRONTING INNOVATION

With the pivot from inclusion to innovation, artists advocated for new pipelines and infrastructure needed to build narrative power for BIPOC, women, queer, trans, undocumented, and/or disabled artists, and the Collaborative responded with unprecedented levels of support:

- > **New pipeline programs** launched by [ARRAY Crew](#), [Color Creative](#), [Starfish Accelerator](#), the [Disruptors Fellowship](#), and other grantee partners now exist to center BIPOC, trans, disabled, and immigrant artists and workers as a driving creative force in Hollywood.
- > **New television writers rooms models** created by grantee partners [Break the Room](#), [Unleashing Giants](#), and the [Barcid Foundation](#) are changing how the television industry develops content.

## SEEDING NEW FIELD LEADERS

With the goal of expanding the narrative infrastructure of communities historically invisibilized in American popular culture, the Collaborative invested in previously under-resourced field leaders. For example:

- > [The Pillars Fund](#). With the Collaborative's seed funding and partnership, the Pillars Fund designed and launched the Muslim Narrative Cohort, hired a director of culture change, and subsequently launched, in collaboration with the Ford Foundation, a report on Muslim representation on screen and a new artist pipeline fellowship co-presented by Oscar-nominated actor Riz Ahmed.
- > [IllumiNative](#). With the Collaborative as its first funder, IllumiNative translated findings from its research project, Reclaiming Native Truth, into a multi-pronged narrative change strategy that included advising the industry on Indigenous representation and co-leading the #TheTimelsNow campaign to change the name of the Washington football team. They are co-founders of CultureSurge and becoming a major racial justice organization with culture change as a core priority.

## FROM SILOED TO NETWORKED

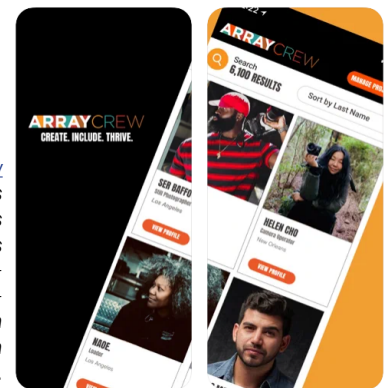
Within five years, the field has moved from siloed to deeply connected, and where new infrastructure for coordination is achieving culture and narrative change goals at mass audience scale. The Collaborative has often been the first philanthropic supporter of initiatives dedicated to building transformational cross-sector partnerships. For example:

- > [Harness](#), [CultureSurge](#), [Storyline Partners](#), [Yes. And Laughter Lab](#), the [Gender Justice Entertainment Hub](#), and more.

“The Collaborative’s investments in our work gave us the flexibility to be first at something, to blaze a trail.”

- Grantee

The [ARRAY crew app](#) facilitates opportunities for professionals from underrepresented populations in the film and television industry.



## DEFINING NARRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Rashad Robinson, CEO of Color of Change, asserts in his [foundational article on narrative infrastructure](#), “Narrative power is the ability to change the norms and rules our society lives by. Narrative infrastructure is the set of systems we maintain in order to do that reliably over time.”

The Collaborative's grantmaking strategy, outlined on page 11, describes its initial 5-year approach to investing in narrative infrastructure for the pop culture for social change field: artists advancing culture change at a mass scale; social justice organizations activating long-term narrative strategies; narrative change research and learning to inform narrative design and strategy; and experimental programs and technologies that drive a robust and effective field.

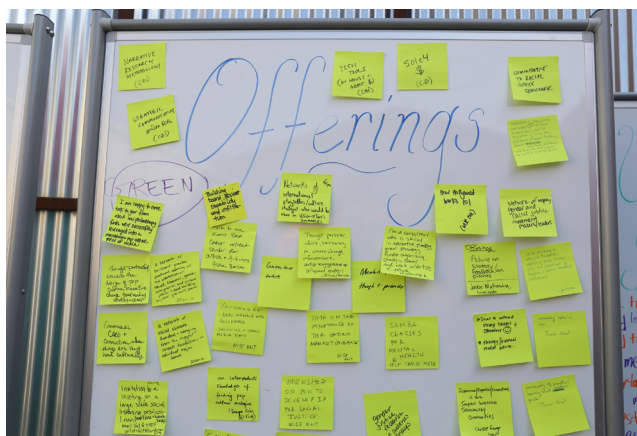


# Immersive Networking Inspires Coordination

By designing and hosting unique spaces to gather, learn, and play together, the Collaborative has inspired radical coordination across the entertainment, social justice, and philanthropic sectors to build the pop culture for social change field. From large-scale learning immersions for the field and philanthropy to showrunner dinners, genius banks, and parties at Sundance, the field is now practiced, primed, and able to collaborate.



Images from *Entertain Change (2018)* and *Entertain Change: Philanthropy (2019)* hosted at Ava DuVernay's ARRAY campus, together gathering over 150 field and funder leaders to learn, explore, play, and break bread together.



“ I was blown away by what you were able to accomplish in that room and the level of impactful conversations we were able to have in such a short time period. Shifting an entire social justice movement into thinking about broad narrative change strategies is no easy task.

- Entertain Change 2018 Participant

# Robust Learning Emboldens Philanthropy

The Pop Culture Collaborative offers philanthropic institutions robust support, including thought partnership, immersive learning experiences and trips, educational tools, and a vibrant learning community of Managing Partners and other funders. **As a result, dozens of philanthropic institutions have begun to invest boldly in pop culture narrative change leaders, strategies, and infrastructure.**

Narrative change methodology and grantmaking strategy is complex, and, too often, misunderstood or dismissed by philanthropy. Over the last five years, the Collaborative has designed and hosted a range of learning spaces and tools for the philanthropic community. At the heart of this learning community is the Collaborative's Managing Partner network (see page 5), comprised of funders who are committed to sustaining the Collaborative's programs and operations, advancing their institution's knowledge and investments, and supporting each other to navigate institutional barriers to funding narrative change as a cross-cutting issue.

Through their learning and leadership of the Collaborative, many Managing Partners have successfully moved their institutions to center narrative change as a key component of their theories of change, alongside more traditional investments of policy change and organizing. Managing Partner Taryn Higashi, Executive Director of [Unbound Philanthropy](#), the largest U.S. philanthropy focused exclusively on immigration justice, said, "Because of the success of the Collaborative, we are confident in elevating narrative strategy as a proactive, long-term approach to achieving our goals, and it represents the largest percentage of our grantmaking in the U.S."

The Collaborative is in the process of building out a formal philanthropy-wide learning community informed by the education and strategy work done with the Managing Partners and the innovative spaces designed to embolden philanthropy to invest in this essential strategy.

“Through incubation funding, the Collaborative is able to get in at the ground level. This has helped us at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation get familiar with new organizations, many that have now become central to our grant making in narrative change.”

- Isabelle Gerard  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Pop Culture Collaborative Managing Partner

## ENTERTAIN CHANGE: PHILANTHROPY

In November 2019, more than 100 philanthropic leaders from around the country spent two days at Ava DuVernay's ARRAY campus for an immersive learning event and community celebration. Co-hosted by the Collaborative and 12 field leaders, participants engaged in rigorous and creative learning experiences, explored interactive case studies, and pushed thinking through peer-to-peer conversations to understand narrative change as a keystone strategy for change. The community came together to celebrate the emerging pop culture for social change field and the community of philanthropists who support it, featuring a party with LA-based grantees and a community lunch underscoring the importance of learning and working together.



[Watch to get a feel](#) for the dynamic learning space and community that was formed during ENTERTAIN CHANGE: Philanthropy.

**WATCH**





# Narrative System Answers the Call in 2020

The Collaborative long planned to move into the third phase of the Collaborative’s Theory of Narrative Change—seeding a new narrative ocean to awaken a yearning for a new way of life—in 2020. What the team could not have imagined was that 2020 would become one of the most consequential years of our lifetimes. When a global pandemic, nationwide racial reckoning, and a crucial election converged that year, the Collaborative’s strategy and infrastructure only increased in value and relevance.

**In May 2020, the Collaborative launched the Becoming America Fund—a first-of-its-kind, multi-year, multi-million dollar initiative to test a narrative systems framework,** funding and coordinating a narrative network of pop culture for social change practitioners to work together to “ignite public imagination about our pluralist future.” Rooted in the Collaborative’s research on mental models and behaviors that characterize pluralist culture, Becoming America supported grantees to advance three cultural shifts:

- > **The Abundance Mindset** / More Is More
- > **The Seekers Mindset** / Embracing Difference is Always the Answer
- > **The Upstanders Mindset** / The Time to Step Into the Fight for Justice is Now

In the launch phase (Summer 2020 - March 2021), the Fund awarded a total of \$2.75 million to more than 50 social justice organizations, cultural organizations, and creative companies to produce and distribute digital fiction and nonfiction videos, podcasts, multiplatform story experiences, games, pop songs and music videos, essays, culture change campaigns, and fandom activations in order to ignite public imagination about the pluralist nation we could become.

## IMMERSE YOURSELF



Dive into the Becoming America Narrative Ocean. The [Becoming America Story Portal](#) explores each of the mindsets and the phenomenal work of over 50 grantees unleashed in nine months.



[Click here](#) to see Becoming America’s narrative network coordinated around three cultural shifts.

“The Becoming America Fund tested the Collaborative’s narrative system strategy in a year like no other. It was extremely powerful to see it come together and the results were extraordinary and impactful.

- Alissa Black  
Luminate  
Pop Culture Collaborative Managing Partner



# Becoming America Reaches 100M+ People

Collectively, grantees of the 2020-2021 launch phase of Becoming America reached more than 100 million people, demonstrating that by activating a narrative system, powered by a narrative network, the Collaborative is on its way to building a field capable of building the yearning in more than 150 million people to co-create a just and pluralist society in which everyone is perceived to belong, inherently, and treated as such.

The Becoming America Narrative Network proved to be an important contributor to narrative meaning making in 2020 and early 2021, shaping major narrative moments of the election season while also focusing on specific movement goals. Highlights include:

- > **The Abundance Mindset:** [Election Defenders](#) brought Joy to the Polls through its nonpartisan movement to make voting a celebration, providing roving concerts at polling sites around the country and sparked international coverage in outlets like [The Guardian](#), [BuzzFeed News](#), and [The Rachel Maddow Show](#).
- > **The Seeker's Mindset:** [People's Action](#) Director George Goehl's podcast [To See Each Other](#), disrupting dominant narratives about small town America, was downloaded more than 80,000 times and has been featured in [The Rolling Stone](#) and [The Atlantic](#), among others.
- > **The Upstander's Mindset:** [Offsides Productions](#) released "[What to My People Is the Fourth of July?](#)" a collaboration with the Movement for Black Lives, starring *Hamilton's* Daveed Diggs. The video has more than 25 million views to date and garnered coverage from [CBS This Morning](#), [NowThis](#), and [The Hollywood Reporter](#).



**WATCH** [Rachel Maddow covers the Joy to the Polls project](#) as "the first good news story about our terrible voting system," featuring Nelini Stamp, director of Frontline Election Defenders.



## THE PLURALIST VISIONARIES

As part of the Becoming America Fund, the Collaborative launched the Pluralist Visionaries Program to expand the influence and reach of cultural stewards and guides—nationally recognized artists and social justice leaders whose ideas and stories shape the intellectual, moral, and cultural waters that we all swim in. The program seeks to move leaders from their communities into the national spotlight, propel them into mainstream conversations, and build enough clout such that they can affect public dialogue and influence industries.

But how is this done? Enter the Abundance League. For decades, the entertainment industry has successfully helped artists discover their public voice and grow their followings. The Collaborative turned to these experts, advisors, and coaches in public relations, media production, social media and digital branding and created the Abundance League, a supported squad modeled after the infrastructure commonly built to launch an entertainment artist's career.

The Abundance League has helped introduce these voices and their storytelling projects to audiences that may not have been familiar with their work, through features and interviews in national publications and broadcast shows, including *Vanity Fair*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Marie Claire*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *InStyle*, *The Daily Beast*, *National Public Radio*, *Pod Save America*, and *NowThis*.

## MEET THE VISIONARIES

[Learn more](#) about the inaugural cohort.



# Impact Beyond the Numbers

The numbers are impressive: \$25 million raised to support the growth of the field, 100 million people reached through a groundbreaking narrative system design, and 300 partners networked across entertainment, social justice, and research industries. But these numbers only tell part of the story. **Over the last five years, the Pop Culture Collaborative's grantee partners have been responsible for many of the most transformational and visible cultural advances made by social justice movements, including:**

- > [Ai-jen Poo](#) and [Paola Mendoza](#), driving the national outcry against the separation of immigrant children and parents at the U.S. border.
- > [Eric Ward](#), elucidating the threat of a well-resourced, organized white nationalist movement after Unite the Right in Charlottesville and the Capitol insurrection on January 6th.
- > [Imara Jones](#), shining a light on the role that Black trans women and nonbinary people have played in the recent Black Lives Matter uprisings and broader racial, gender, and economic justice movements.
- > [Crystal Echo Hawk](#), with [IllumiNative](#), creating the tipping point in the Native-led movement to pressure the Washington football team to change its name.
- > [Nelini Stamp](#), [Sarah Sophie Flicker](#), [Paola Mendoza](#), [Marya Bangee](#), [Tracy Sturdivant](#), [Favianna Rodriguez](#), [America Ferrera](#), and hundreds of artists and cultural strategists who used the experience of joy and the feeling of abundance as a cultural strategy to ensure that every vote would be cast and counted during the presidential election (helping to make possible the largest voter turnout in U.S. history).
- > [Valarie Kaur](#), uplifting our collective need to grieve, heal, and ensure accountability during the presidential inauguration.
- > [Tarana Burke](#) and the multiracial community of survivor-organizers who created the groundswell around sexual harassment and violence through the [Time's Up](#) launch at the 2018 Golden Globes and during the Harvey Weinstein trial.
- > Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic's devastating impact on the economic security of artists and cultural organizers, [Opportunity Agenda](#), [SOZE Foundation](#), [Center for Cultural Power](#), and [PEN America](#) used funding from the Collaborative to rapidly distribute emergency funds.



Grantee Paola Mendoza's *I am a Child* photos protesting the separation of migrant families were exhibited across the U.S. and featured in popular media such as [Teen Vogue](#).

## FIELD-WIDE LEARNING

Beyond these numbers and highlights, the Collaborative understands that when building a field, assessing impact requires a robust and multilayered lens.

### Field-wide Learning System

The Collaborative is working closely with grantee partner the [USC Norman Lear Center](#) to design and implement a field-wide impact and learning system. The project will consist of coordinated research, evaluation, and learning projects that together will help the pop culture for social change field track and understand its collective growth, shifting ecology, and long-term culture change impact. This includes the prototype of an evaluation system to measure the growth of a pluralist narrative ocean, tracking tools to systematically assess the field's collective impact, and a first-of-its-kind field-wide mapping of the emerging pop culture for social change field.

### Program Evaluation

The Collaborative is also working with Engage R&D to complete a learning and evaluation process of the [Becoming America Fund's](#) inaugural year to inform a framework to help the Collaborative and other philanthropic organizations understand what it takes to support a narrative network.

### READ

To read more about how grantees are building narrative power, [explore grantees' press coverage.](#)



**Which brings us to today.**

We are on the precipice of a historic breakthrough—a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the American people to decisively choose to move in the direction of justice and pluralist culture.

**The Collaborative is ready.**

Join with us.



# We Need to Scale to Meet this Moment

**The Collaborative knows that if we who believe in justice do not activate public imagination in this once-in-a-generation moment, others will—and they are.**

White nationalism is not only on the rise, it is becoming normalized. The impact of 20 years of institutionalized terror against Muslims in the wake of 9/11 is in sharp focus. Critical Race Theory and even basic education on the country's history of racism are under fierce attack. Attacks on immigrants and refugees continue relentlessly, hate crimes against Asian Americans are on the rise, and a wave of anti-trans legislation has been passed in many states. Toxic masculinity and misogyny, which are core to the expression of White racial supremacy, permeate all of these cultural battlefields. These attacks are being waged every day, locally and nationally, and have already set the stage for a contentious fight to

preserve democracy. The White nationalist movement continues to galvanize large swaths of the populace, pumping disinformation across digital platforms, building on decades of investments in media properties and personalities to claim authorship of the country's origin story—and future of our country. The narrative infrastructure they have built is strong and their investments are vast. **We must move now, we must move fast, and we must go big.**

The good news: over the last five years, the Pop Culture Collaborative has forged a clear path forward. With a tested narrative systems approach, developed in partnership with a robust pop culture for social change field, it is ready to scale to meet this moment, and determined to help millions of people step boldly into our pluralist future.

## TOGETHER, OUR PLURALIST FUTURE IS POSSIBLE.

The Pop Culture Collaborative has built a vibrant community with many of the greatest minds in the narrative change space. Your invitation to join is here: If you are excited to learn, experiment, and invest in narrative change, the Pop Culture Collaborative is your home.

### PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS

#### IMMERSE YOURSELF IN LEARNING

The Collaborative works to advance the understanding and leveraging of narrative strategy within philanthropy. Invite the Collaborative to do a learning session for your Board or Executive office, or to speak at a philanthropic gathering.

#### BECOME A MANAGING PARTNER

The Managing Partner community makes large scale, 3+ year investments, receives deep thought partnership on narrative change strategy, among other benefits, and plays a governance role if desired.

#### INVEST IN EXPLORATORY AREAS

Make a targeted investment in research and analysis, narrative infrastructure, field organizing and more within our exploratory areas: Gender Justice, Digital Culture, Immigration & Land Stewardship, True History, Trans Futurism and, Disability Innovation.

### FIELD PARTNERS

#### LEARN FROM FELLOW FIELD PARTNERS

Go deep into the strategy and brilliance of pop culture for social change field partners' work through the [Becoming America Story Portal](#) and other curated [learning resources](#) on the Collaborative's website.

#### BECOME A GRANTEE PARTNER

The Collaborative offers grants of \$30K - \$200K to invest in the field's narrative infrastructure and drive transformative experiences for mass audiences. Learn more about our grant programs and how to apply [here](#).

#### ENGAGE IN EXPLORATORY AREAS

Join a genius bank, cohort or narrative network in one of our exploratory areas of Gender Justice, Digital Culture, Immigration & Land Stewardship, True History, Trans Futurism and, Disability Innovation.

### GET CONNECTED

Pop Culture Collaborative Staff would love to connect with interested peers. Please get in touch!

**For philanthropic investment:** [Bridgit Antoinette Evans](#), CEO

**For exploratory areas:** [Tracy Van Slyke](#), Chief Strategy Officer

**For grantmaking opportunities:** [Rupa Balasubramanian](#), VP of Field Resourcing

**For learning opportunities:** [Nayantara Sen](#), Director of Field and Funder Learning

# Imagination requested

**Imagine an ocean.** And in this ocean there's a little fish—we'll call him Nemo. And Nemo is swimming around, doing fish things. Just living his life. What Nemo is not doing is thinking, "Water. Water. I'm in water. This is water all around me." Because water is just Nemo's world. It's just reality.

Now, imagine that like Nemo, we are all living in a kind of ocean that swirls around us every day. Except instead of water, our ocean is full of narratives, ideas, stories. Every day, we engage with these narratives—in the songs we listen to, the books and magazines we read, the show we're bingeing, our social media feeds.

Like Nemo, we are not thinking "Narrative. Narrative. Narratives all around me." And yet, we are making decisions—who belongs, who doesn't, who has value, who does not—because of the narrative oceans that we swim in.

In our current world, some of the narrative oceans we swim in are toxic, distorting our sense of self and our faith in our ability to see each other across our divides. In the worst cases, these narratives are separating us from our families, preventing us from accessing life-saving vaccines, and telling police whose lives are worth protecting and who we should fear. This is the power of narrative oceans.

At the Pop Culture Collaborative, we believe that our nation is on the cusp of an historic breakthrough: a once-in-a-generation moment when tens of millions of Americans are actively choosing to meet at the riverside, wade into the water, and begin the hard and delicate work of belonging together in a just, pluralist society,

We believe that social justice movements and the donors who support them cannot realize the just world we all seek until we commit to transforming the narrative oceans in which we all swim, replacing harmful narratives with new ones that make a just and pluralist future feel not only possible, but preferable.

**JOIN US.**

- Adapted from *Stories to Systems*,  
Bridgit Antoinette Evans

POP  
CULTURE  
COLLAB

**Writer/Curator/Producer**

Ginger Daniel is the Senior Advisor for Philanthropic Partnerships. She has advised the Collaborative's Managing Partners and staff since the organization's early design and launch in 2016, bringing a unique and critical lens to the Collaborative's intentions and impact over its first five years.

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