

Grantmaking Strategy Spotlight

Culture Change Research




2019

Culture change research includes the creation or uncovering of data; and the development of analysis, design and/or sharing of actionable insights that inform narrative, story and/or culture change strategy; plus activate and align more collaborators in the pop culture for social change field.

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Culture change has a particular desired outcome: to shift people’s beliefs, and specifically, the behaviors catalyzed by those beliefs. Culture change research helps uncover and make sense of what motivates and influences people in order to reach actionable insights and create strategies based on mental models, stories, and immersive experiences powerful enough to, over time, influence beliefs and, ultimately, behaviors.

There are two important kinds of culture change research: **1) Audience Research**, research into people to understand who they are, what motivates their beliefs, (e.g., media, culture, family, economics) and how their beliefs manifest as behaviors, and **2) Industry Research**, research into the ecosystem of a specific field of cultural

production, (e.g., the film industry, the television industry, the music industry) to inform and/or activate short- and long-term culture change strategies.

It is important to note that audience research is different from, but often confused with, opinion research. Opinion research is best used for organizing, communications, and/or policy strategies seeking to identify and track current opinions, or test messages in response to specific issues or moments. In relation to culture change, opinion research can help uncover a barrier to behavioral change or signify a marker in belief shift (giving it an important role to play in tracking and evaluation) but is not a substitute for audience research that directly interrogates and analyzes audience behaviors, and the beliefs and motivations behind them.

PHILANTHROPY CAN FUND researchers, research entities, cultural strategists, social justice organizations, and creative companies individually and/or in different forms of collaboration to engage in culture change research.



Why Do We Need To Fund Culture Change Research?

Tailored approaches to learning and understanding audiences and their behaviors yield better strategies and greater impact.



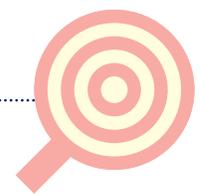
Who Conducts Culture Change Research?

Cross-disciplinary researchers who are collaborative and focused on learning for design and action.



What Kind Of Culture Change Research Is Needed?

Research that fuels knowledge and understanding of audiences, the industry, dominant narratives, and how entertainment influences people.



How Can We Fund Culture Change Research?

Actionable culture change research comes from collaboration, experimentation, and dedicated infrastructure building.



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A culture change research process: 1) establishes the problem that needs solving; 2) identifies the most appropriate research technique(s) for solving it; 3) conducts the research and analyzes the resulting data to create actionable insights that inform the design and implementation of a strategy; and 4) helps with tracking, measurement, and strategy adaptation as needed.

- We cannot change what we don't understand. Strategists, artists, social justice organizations, and philanthropy engaged in culture change work need to understand people (audiences) at the behavioral level—who they are, what motivates them, how they behave, and why they behave that way. With these kinds of data and insights, strategies can be developed for specific audiences.
- Artists provided with research insights can better understand their influential role and content creation opportunities, as well as the importance of collaboration—with audiences, social justice organizations, and industry partners.
- By working with culture change researchers, social justice organizations can begin to unpack the questions, beliefs, and behaviors they are most curious or unclear about, and uncover important analysis and data to design their culture change campaigns, collaborations, and narrative strategies, as well as to track, adjust, and evaluate the success of their work.

- Research into industries that play a critical role in cultural production can influence change in both their composition (e.g., the number of people of color in positions of power in the TV and movie industry) and in the content they produce.



“One of the things I thought wouldn't be useful was research. But I think Color Of Change, which did a report on the representation in television writers rooms (↗), gave folks in the entertainment industry something to hang their hat on. The numbers gave them a basis to say: we're establishing a baseline, you guys are not doing well, and you can come back and have those conversations in a year and see if there's been any movement.... The role of research, and here I'd add The Opportunity Agenda, which did a similar study on the representation of immigrants on television (↗), can be really helpful, for philanthropy to understand the scale and breadth of the problem and to help to organize in the social justice space. But more important, I thought, was the way it was more useful in the entertainment space.”

Adey Fisseha, Unbound Philanthropy (Break The Story, Vol. 3, Philanthropy's Unique Role in Television) (↗)



Who Conducts Culture Change Research?

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The pop culture for social change field relies on a multidisciplinary approach, conducting research and amassing data and insights through a variety of methodologies and from a range of fields and providers.

- **Cultural strategists** with an understanding of research methodologies appropriate to culture change work (often trained in marketing and advertising fields) bring this expertise to their approach to, and design of, narrative and culture change strategies.
- **Academics** who study entertainment, media, and/or civic society, as well as data scientists and practitioners from the behavioral, social, and cognitive sciences (whether in academia or in the private sector) also play a critical role in bringing cutting-edge discoveries from the social sciences to bear on the issue of culture change. They study, track, unearth, and analyze data on issues, narratives, and the effects of contents on audiences, and they create methodologies to track diversity and bias at a systems and policy level in specific industries.
- **Market and consumer researchers, audience listening firms, individual data analysts, and analytic companies** bring expertise and practices from private or academic sectors to the field of pop culture for social change.



“The big players already collect lots of proprietary audience data, including biometric data, in order to make their content more commercially successful.... Our assumption is that they don’t ask the kinds of questions we ask because they are not interested in achieving social change through storytelling. Our dataset is engineered to serve social justice storytellers, who want to optimize the social impact of their work.”

Johanna Blakley, Norman Lear Center (Break The Story, Vol. 3, “Beyond the Numbers”) (↗)



What Kind Of Culture Change Research Is Needed?

Research that fuels knowledge and understanding of audiences, the industry, dominant narratives, and how entertainment influences people.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH

There are multiple approaches to audience research, including the study of:

- **Trends and Norms**

To understand how and where trends (emerging collective behaviors) and norms (established collective behaviors) are manifesting and changing—allowing pop culture for social change field members to capitalize on opportunities for cultural interventions and to predict possible points of resistance.

- **Narrative and Content Analysis**

To track and understand content (or other kinds of narrative expression) in order to develop insights that can identify narrative patterns and/or harmful ideas. The results can guide the development of transformative mental models, narrative archetypes, iconic characters, story arcs, and immersive experiences designed to create concrete changes in how specific audiences think, feel, and behave in the world.

- **Motivational Research**

To understand the drivers of individual and/or collective behaviors—and the levers strong enough to move them—by unearthing and more deeply understanding specific audience’s psycho-emotional motivations and/or barriers to action.

- **Audience Profiles and Segmentation**

To understand and identify audience segments that share psycho-emotional motivations or barriers; character attributes; behavioral habits; core beliefs, mental models, worldviews; and/or demographics.

- **Subcultures**

To understand the structure and identity of different subcultures (e.g., pop culture fandoms), the role they play in culture change, and the potential they have to incubate and accelerate desired social changes.

- **Impact and Reception**

To determine how people's perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and, ultimately, their behaviors are affected (and formed) by different content and experiences. Media effects research is a common, and critical, area of study.

INDUSTRY RESEARCH

Industry research, often used to spotlight systemic issues and to advance specific culture change goals can track, uncover and analyze:

- The occurrence of issues, narratives, storylines, and harmful ideas in media content.
- The presence or absence of historically excluded people in industry workplaces, including leadership positions, in front of and behind the camera.
- The financial and social incentive structures in companies, studios, and/or networks, and the effects these have on content and community.



"Research is about opportunity: seeing clues about the behavior of people or the patterns of an environment that help us push past the limit of our assumptions about them, thereby helping us get people ready to receive something new into their lives and much more effectively stimulate shifts in their behaviors. Research cannot tell us what to do, but it can reveal new opportunities."

Senior Fellow Ryan Senser, *It's Not Safe Out Here*
(Pop Culture Collaborative Narrative System workshop)



How Can We Fund Culture Change Research?

Actionable culture change research comes from collaboration, experimentation, and dedicated infrastructure building.

- **Collaboration**
Social justice groups contract with academics, research and marketing firms, and/or individual researchers, strategists, analysts, and scientists. This collaboration can help groups frame questions that are relevant to their culture change goals, and execute the best culture change research.
- **Experimentation**
Innovative practitioners in various research sectors use different actions or processes to try out new ideas, methodologies, or activities to generate new information. This innovative research can help pop culture for social change field members gain new insights into audiences and industries.
- **Capacity Building/Infrastructure**
Social justice organizations and content producers develop the internal staffing and infrastructure to build ongoing audience research and tracking into their design, implementation, and evaluation.
- **Co-Design**
The capacity for learning and action from culture change research enables development and co-design of of pop culture strategies with audiences, and production of media that sparks and invites audience participation.



“Curiosity expressed through research got us to new answers, to break through.”

Rashad Robinson, Color Of Change
(PCC @ frank: Presence to Power) (↗)

“When audiences are part of the creation of a story, whether it be watching, listening, or a social action when the creative process is done, we have built in their desires, interests, and emotions.”

Mikhael Tara Garver, 13EXP
(PopCollab.org Interview: 3 Questions) (↗)

Models That Pop Culture Collaborative Grantees Are Using For Culture Change Research



Audience Research

OPPORTUNITIES

- As the starting point for the design of an effective strategy, audience research provides pop culture for social change field members with the ability to:
 - Name narrative shift challenges.
 - Identify target audiences.
 - Articulate desired cultural shifts and narrative goals.
 - Begin building cultural interventions (e.g., designing campaigns, bringing on partners, articulating a narrative strategy).
 - Provide context for ongoing impact assessment and adjustment.
 - Inform evaluation processes and goals.
- Social justice organizations, as well as artists and entertainment companies, are developing their own methods of tracking how audiences and pop culture fans engage with content and concepts.

RESULTS

- Data and actionable insights that can help create road maps for pop culture for social change field members to design narrative strategies, culture change campaigns, content creation, and/or activation strategies for specific audiences.

POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE GRANTEE EXAMPLES

- Caring Across Generations (CAG)** partnered with the Second City's Brandstage, a market research designed experiences that uses a live audience as a focus group to test and develop narrative ideas. Findings informed

CAG's development of original narrative content in partnership with comedy writers, artists, and storytellers.

- It's Not Safe Out Here's** (and Pop Culture Collaborative Senior Fellow for Narrative Strategy) Ryan Senser led a narrative trend analysis process as part of the Collaborative's exploration and design of a "Towards a Pluralist Future" narrative system.
- futurePerfect Lab** (↗) partnered with the Media Impact Project (MIP) at the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center to produce the study "Are You What You Watch?" (2019) that examines the connections between television media preferences and political beliefs.
- People's Action**, in partnership with marketing experts, implemented an audience listening research program in targeted rural areas and small-town communities to uncover the roots of beliefs about immigrants and people of color, as an initial step towards building a narrative strategy.
- Cultural strategists (Pop Culture Collaborative Senior Fellow) Erin Potts and Amber Phillips worked with the **Midwest Culture Lab (MCL)** to engage in a "cultural audit" process to uncover the storylines, influencers, and experiences specifically influencing young people of color in the Midwest. Results informed MCL's story platform strategy.
- Sparks & Honey**, in partnership with the Pop Culture Collaborative, used its proprietary Q technology platform to study the online behaviors of specific pop culture fandoms as a laboratory to understand how, why, and in what context pluralist and anti-pluralist behaviors show up in broader society.



Industry Research

OPPORTUNITIES

- Industry research helps create a transparent and accurate picture of the industry's advancement towards justice, and also identifies and creates pressure points to incentivize change.
- Historically marginalized communities working inside Hollywood, as well as academics and advocates outside the industry, are working individually and together to document problems and inequity both in content and behind the scenes to advance particular culture change goals.

RESULTS

- Knowledge about the prevalence of and portrayal of specific issues and communities to inform cultural strategies.
- Specific data and qualitative analysis of structural, hiring, and policy to design and activate pressure points for change.
- Evidence to back campaigns to hold media producers (showrunners, studios, networks) accountable for bigoted/sexist content about historically marginalized people.

POP CULTURE COLLABORATIVE GRANTEE EXAMPLES

- **Define American** partnered with the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center and *The Hollywood Reporter* to release the study, *Immigration Nation: Exploring Immigrant Portrayals on Television* (↗) (2018) documenting how immigrants are portrayed on television shows.
 - **Haqq and Hollywood: Pop Culture Collaborative** Senior Fellow Maytha Alhassen, PhD, Maytha Alhassen, wrote the report *Haqq and Hollywood: Illuminating 100 years of Muslim Tropes and How To Transform Them* (↗) (2018).
 - **The Opportunity Agenda** released *The Case of the Cultural Influencers: Colin Kaepernick, Jimmy Kimmel, and #MeToo* (↗) (2019) examining three cases of high-profile entertainers and athletes speaking out or advocating for a social and/or policy change.
 - **The Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity**, a consortium of working television writers, released *Behind the Scenes: The State of Inclusion in TV Writers Rooms* (↗), (2019) a report detailing the career and creative barriers faced by diverse writers in the TV industry.
- **Color Of Change** released the report, *Race In The Writers' Room* (↗) (2017) highlighting the failure of the television industry to hire Black writers and other writers of color, and how this failure advances harmful stereotypes of Black people in television content.

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