

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

‘PHF should...’: an analysis of responses

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Contents

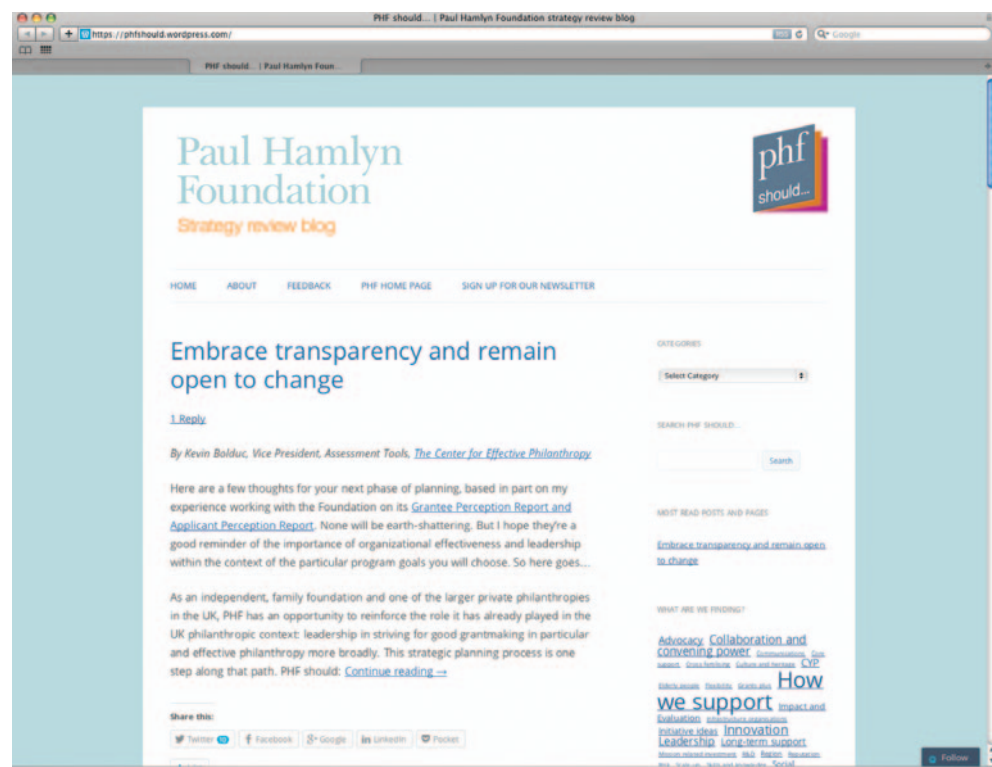
The exercise	2
Response to the exercise and how PHF is seen	4
What PHF should fund	5
How PHF should fund	8
Additional roles PHF should play	10
Conclusion	11

The exercise

'PHF should...' was set up as part of PHF's strategy review process in 2013/14. Its main aim was to capture ideas from individuals and organisations working in the fields in which PHF was active, which could feed into discussions among trustees and staff about future Foundation strategy.

The initiative was open from September 2013 through to January 2014. The invitation to participants was very simple. PHF asked respondents to complete the phrase 'PHF should...' however they saw fit. Further guidance was minimal, apart from a request not to exceed a single side of A4 paper, and a clear statement that the Foundation wanted to be challenged by responses. A website was created (www.phfshould.wordpress.com) to publish a range of responses, and to encourage further discussion of ideas among stakeholders. Sharing via social media was supported with a hashtag, #PHFshould.

The initiative was publicised on the Foundation's website and social media channels, through email and postcard campaigns, in articles in sector media, and through networks such as the Association of Charitable Foundations. Personal invitations to contribute were issued by each member of the senior leadership team, including to known critics of the Foundation's activities and to thought leaders within the Foundation's fields who were unfamiliar with the detail of the Foundation's work. The aim, as well as to attract thoughtful contributions, was to expand the reach of the initiative beyond the Foundation's immediate networks.



A further purpose of the initiative was to signal greater openness in the Foundation's activities. Such an open consultation process was very unusual for a private funder. In planning the work, Foundation staff were aware of the potential risks associated with opening the Foundation up to scrutiny in this way, though the greater risk was that the initiative would fail to attract responses.

The Foundation received 86 responses, which ranged from short paragraphs to much longer pieces running to several pages. Around half of respondents were senior figures including chief executives of current or past grantee organisations, partner organisations, and sector leaders. Respondents also included independent advisors and consultants, other funders, and project beneficiaries including young people. There were several collective responses and at least one international submission.

The dataset was coded and analysed thematically with Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software. This diagram represents the final 18 codes used in the analysis, and their relative frequency. The box sizes represent the number of sources coded per theme, and the colour scale from dark green (highest) to dark red (lowest) represents the number of references coded per theme:

Codes compared by number of coding references

Funding structure, priorities, criteria Number of coding references 75 Number of responses coded 41	Continue 60 31	Collaborate and strengthen 57 36	Use expertise, leverage, resources 57 33	Innovation 39 25	Campaign 18 14	Invest in leadership, back individuals 16 11	Place and London-centricity 15 10
		Specific project or programme suggestion 53 35	Outcomes, Evaluation, Impact 42 23	Sustainability 29 22	Learn from other funders or internationally 14 10	Investing for impact 10 6	Future facing 8 6
					Youth 13 7	Paul Hamlyn's values 9 8	Legacy 7 4
							Join up 6 5

In the remainder of this report, **code** names are highlighted in **bold**.

Note on coding

Coding was a process of identifying themes that were repeated across different responses, reviewing and some merging of these themes, and naming them as codes. Analysis then consisted of looking for meaningful patterns within individual codes, and at the relationships or 'clustering' between different codes. 'Clustering' is the frequency with which individual responses or sections of text were coded as containing two or more themes, and hence points to the recurrent relationships between themes.

Response to the exercise and how PHF was seen

The response to the '*PHF should...*' exercise was overwhelmingly positive, with many respondents expressing their pleasure at being asked to contribute. Several explicitly said that the exercise itself was demonstrative of the Foundation's openness and commitment to close working relationships with both grantees and other significant partners in the sectors in which it worked.

Responses commonly contained congratulatory words (often as an opener) about one or more of the things that PHF already did. The code **continue** was used to capture the specific points that respondents emphasised PHF should carry on doing. Many of these points related substantively to both *what PHF should fund* and *how PHF should fund* (see below). However there was also a clear and more general theme around PHF's commitment to partnership working and approachability. The quote below captures a sense of this and is by no means atypical in its content or tone.

'Not just saying this – in my 15 years in the not for profit sector, PHF is the most extraordinary funder we've come across – not simply because [you] have funded [us] but because you actually walk the partnership walk. You test your grantees so that they can actually deliver the vision you've created together with them – and always in an insightful, proportionate and constructive way. There is rigour, but it's never misplaced. So – don't change that.'

The QDA software shows the code **continue** to be closely clustered with the codes **innovation, organisation and sector sustainability, campaign, collaborate and strengthen**, and **youth**. This highlights that these were also themes connected to how PHF was seen from the outside. Teasing out these connections, a picture emerges of a funder that – in several respondents' views – prioritises innovative work focused on young people's development, while recognising that the organisations and sectors it supports need core sustenance in order for new ideas to take root. Others particularly valued PHF's willingness to take a strong stand on issues it feels passionately about. There was also praise for what was described as the Foundation's recognition that change is effected in various ways, including through collaborative partnerships and networks, which themselves require nurturing.

3.2 What PHF should fund

The code **specific project or programme suggestion** was used to capture the explicit recommendations made for areas of work which PHF should fund or initiate. These were a mixture of the entirely new, and follow-ons from existing or previously funded work. A notable related theme was to **invest in leadership and back individuals**. This ranged from suggestions to give grants to existing sector leaders to allow them to further develop their organisations' work unencumbered by specific project or outcome-based funding, to developing new funding programmes which would identify, nurture and support young or less well established artists, creative producers/thinkers, and future sector leaders. Several proposed that this would be a highly strategic use of funding that would create a clear **legacy**, and for which there was both great need and a precedent in the UK – including PHF's existing work – as well as internationally.

Innovation and **organisation and sector sustainability** were two recurrent and closely connected themes in responses about 'what' PHF should fund. Some strong and divergent views were expressed on this pairing. Many respondents recognised and valued PHF's focus on **innovation**. Some proposed that the Foundation prioritise even more strongly the novel, experimental, and/or 'risky' work with which they associated PHF. However several emphasised the importance of foregrounding **organisational and sector sustainability**, either in addition to or in preference to innovation. Current financial and policy climates, as well as willingness to fund organisational core costs were frequently mentioned in responses containing these latter views. Some took a strong line against PHF (and other funders') emphasis on **innovation**, arguing that it can be to the detriment of 'particularly' smaller organisations, for whom constant pressure to come up with new ideas, plan and fundraise for them is a drain on resources, detracting from their core missions.

Recognising and (where appropriate) encouraging the spread of successful existing models was also a repeatedly made point in relation to **innovation**, for instance:

'Encourage innovation, but not at the expense of proven interventions: Innovative ideas are important to challenge the status quo, however often innovation and novelty are favoured over projects which have long term, proven results.'

This was also connected to the theme of **legacy**, notably that for some respondents – especially grantees and those connected to PHF's Special Initiatives – there was still much to be done to embed and build on successful innovative/experimental practice resulting from PHF's funding.

Collaborate and strengthen was a large and diverse theme encompassing both 'what' and 'how' respondents felt PHF should fund, as well as additional roles the Foundation should play. Some made specific reference to previously funded projects and initiatives which had encouraged joint working across organisations and sectors, with the result of creating lasting relationships and shared approaches to issues. It was suggested that the Foundation extend this tendency, either funding (more) networks or infrastructure bodies specifically, or encouraging applications from and initiating projects with groups of organisations rather than individual ones. The benefits of both of these approaches were referred to as spreading best practice across a wider range and at a deeper level, for instance:

'Create networks that share learning – not just with the great and good – but across practitioners at all levels. Fund infrastructure bodies that have a track record in sharing knowledge.'

Others tempered these views by noting that collaborative work was unlikely to be right in all cases, and that other approaches should be created and encouraged to allow individual grantee organisations to share their learning with others in their sectors and/or across sectors, both locally and nationally. This was connected in some responses to arguments for building into grants and otherwise encouraging organisations to **campaign** and lobby both government and others about the issues on which they have expertise and passion. Some made concrete suggestions about developing new funding programmes specifically to support campaigning and lobbying activities, either for individual organisations or through networks.

Two themes emerged suggesting PHF pay more attention to the spread of its funding by geography and location. These were eventually merged into one code: **place and London-centricity**. Some responses advocated '*place funding*' as an alternative to thematic, issue, or programme-based funding. For instance: '*focusing on a place and really getting to know and understand how relationships [between organisations and sectors] work*'. Others proposed convening local partnerships around a specific issue or vulnerable group. However the bulk of coded material within this theme was concerned with the perceived disproportionate weighting of funding, both public and charitable, towards London and other large English cities. A relative lack of knowledge about PHF and other philanthropic funders '*outside of London*', in '*the regions*' or '*in coastal towns and rural areas*' was also referred to. Some suggested PHF take action to rebalance the geographical spread of its funding, a few even taking a strong line such as suggesting PHF '*stop investing in organisations in cities of more than 300,000 people*'. Others proposed the Foundation work on expanding its reach and reputation through other means, such as running events outside of London, collaborating with regional funders, or utilising place-based networks.

Finally, a number of responses proposed that the Foundation (continue to) make funding decisions according to the **values of Paul Hamlyn himself**. These suggestions included points about both 'what' and 'how' PHF should fund. They were both from people who had known the philanthropist personally, and those who had not but recognised that his values had shaped the Foundation's culture (board and staff), thus creating an already significant legacy. Some examples of how these values were interpreted by respondents are: '*strong moral purpose [to increase] participation in education*', '*courageous in implementing innovative ideas*' and '*disruptive entrepreneur[ship]*'.

3.3 How PHF should fund

The code **funding structures, priorities, criteria** was created to capture the large number of specific suggestions and observations made about the way PHF should fund. Predictably, responses around this theme were often also inextricably connected to 'what' PHF should fund. Notably however they delved deeper into the Foundation's funding processes including how it should reach grant-making decisions, and how (and to what extent) it should work collaboratively with grantees and others pre- and post-funding.

Several praised and wished to see PHF **continue** to be a '*flexible funder*', which they associated variously with being open to applications taking a novel or unexpected approach to an issue, sensitive to and willing to respond to changes in the external environment, or prepared to adapt the terms of grants according to unforeseen circumstances.

Some emphasised the degree to which PHF gives advice, feedback and otherwise **collaborates** with grantees and others during the life of a grant, to 'co-own' the work. Others felt more could be done in this area, particularly pre-funding, in order to shape and steer the organisations and sectors it works with and the general funding environment, for instance:

'[PHF should] work with those it funds to identify new funding opportunities. Then inspire and challenge them and others to respond. As a sector leader in innovation and change, the Foundation has an influential role in identifying and creating new funding opportunities. The work that forms part of this strategic review is one such important opportunity.'

A connected aspect to this was several specific suggestions or invitations to work with and/or **learn from other funders**, including internationally, to make a stronger more '*mission driven*' impact on a sector, a place, or an issue.

Reference was made by some to the structure of the Foundation's funding – the three Open Grants programmes and the Special Initiatives – with various proposals made. There was a theme around developing clearer and/or '*more streamlined*' areas of focus within Open Grants, with several proposing that ways be found to **join up** or '*cross fertilise*' priorities within each. This extended to calls to encourage or to actively find opportunities to link up grantee and other organisations' activity between the – some felt – relatively distinct sectors which each programme funded. Indeed one call was made to merge the three programmes into a single strand. A small number questioned the way grant-making decisions at PHF (and other foundations) are made internally, with one wondering whether it might be appropriate to delegate more power and influence to programme staff and away from trustees.

Some made reference to the relationship between the Open Grants programmes and the Special Initiatives, and there was a distinct theme here suggesting PHF should initiate more 'experiments' itself, potentially rebalancing its funding structures and priorities as part of this. For instance:

'I think the funding offered to 'sticking plaster' approaches, essential as they are, should be limited in favour of work more likely to support...transformation, in other words offer a 'cure'.'

Others felt that the Open Grants programme should be developed to incorporate some of the strengths of the Special Initiatives, for instance *'to include analysis, reflection and presentation to the outside world, in the way that Learning Away is currently doing'*.

A good deal of reference was made to PHF's approach to **outcomes, evaluation, and impact**. There were calls, from grantees and others, to (continue to) take a creative, open definition of evidence and impact. There were also suggestions to encourage grantees to be honest about their failures as well as success, and to *'place less of an emphasis on easy to measure direct delivery outputs, and continue to be brave, considering the more difficult to quantify outcomes which many charities provide'*. Openness, consistency, and longevity were the key positives for some respondents in the relationship between Foundation and grantee around reporting on outcomes and impact, for instance: *'Board and staff should be ready to stick with chosen goals and strategies long enough to make it possible to see change'*.

Several noted that grantees might need more assistance than is currently given around defining and measuring outcomes, with concrete proposals such as running evaluation workshops at the time of grants being awarded, or having an evaluation team which could be loaned out.

A number of proposals were made about ways in which PHF should consider becoming part of a leading edge by adopting one or more of several new approaches to impact in the (UK and international) philanthropic sector. These included calls to participate in the Open Philanthropy movement by making its impact evidence available to improve funding decisions sector-wide, to experiment with social investment, or to adopt a new mind-set that would involve **investing for impact** through novel approaches such as *'absolute impact'* or *'mission-driven ambition'*, which were explained and advocated for at length.

3.4 Additional roles PHF should play

As is clear from the above, the suggestions made about 'what' and 'how' PHF should fund included to a significant degree things that it should do (or continue doing) which go beyond the essentials of grant-making. It is also clear that PHF is widely understood, and respected, as a funder that is value-driven and seeks to intervene strategically to bring about societal change. However in analysing responses to this exercise a small number of themes emerged which were more explicitly concerned with proposed roles PHF should play in addition to (though still connected) to its grant-making. Frequently, respondents framed their points in such terms.

Thematically, these proposals were connected to PHF using its **expertise, leverage, and resources to collaborate** with **and strengthen** the sectors it works in as well as do more to **campaign** and lobby, including the Foundation having a voice in parliament or talking directly to policy makers itself, or supporting other organisations to have a louder voice. In addition, a number of suggestions were made for the Foundation to use its knowledge, experience, and creativity and take radical **future facing** approaches to significant and challenging issues – such as how to generate alternative educational and economic models.

Several proposed that the most effective way the Foundation might use its expertise to lever change would be to use its positive name and reputation to share and advocate for the benefits of the work it supports with other organisations and influential stakeholders. Particularly in the field of education, it was proposed that it is currently well positioned to set about *'intervening strategically...in a way that disrupts not just a handful of schools but a critical mass of provision'*.

Some felt it should do more to intervene in societal and sector debates through issue-based publications and/or dissemination of its work. There was some recognition, however, that such activities may involve a shift in PHF's currently understood remit, internally and externally. One posed the question: *'does PHF want to be a funder or an influencer, as these require different types and levels of investment?'* The Foundation might also do more, some suggested, to promote philanthropy itself among current and future generations and to create formal and informal opportunities for young people to become involved in grant-making and future sector leadership.

Conclusion

As an exercise, 'PHF should...' has demonstrated one way in which a foundation can successfully gain feedback on its work and inform its thinking about future strategic direction. As such, the process and the results may be of interest to PHF's partners and stakeholders, as well as to other funders.

We must be cautious not to overstate the significance of the results: it was not a representative sample of stakeholders, nor was it intended to inform the strategic review in a direct or 'democratic' way. Nevertheless, the exercise has been of high value in providing 'food for thought' as PHF has worked through the – largely internal – process of its recent strategic review. In addition to the suggestions and proposals made, the themes of which connected to a significant extent with the discussions held and decisions made internally, the results have also provided a large amount of positive validation for much that the Foundation currently does. A commitment to openness and transparency was a major part of this, and the exercise itself was seen by many as a further example of this tendency.

The process could have been completed differently in several ways, which may have yielded somewhat different – which is not necessarily to say more significant, or 'stronger' – results. Rather than asking respondents to simply complete the phrase 'PHF should...', more specific questions might have been asked, perhaps more explicitly connected to the concerns of the strategic review. This may have encouraged responses on a more focused range of topics and/or with higher degrees of thematic comparability. However there was also much merit in the openness of the invitation – expressed by several respondents – which seemed to encourage more by way of creative 'blue sky thinking'. Later in the strategy's development, the Foundation did consult around more specific questions relating to different areas of the strategy, thought this was not a 'public' process.

Respondents could have been asked to identify themselves and their roles according to a set format, which would have allowed more analysis and reporting on the views of different groups. However there was also merit in considering together a mix of views from the diverse group of total respondents. More could have been done to encourage follow-on and debate from the responses published online, and ways found to include this material in the data set to be analysed. A technological platform more conducive to discussion might have facilitated this. However comments were made on some of the responses posted to the blog, and it was evident that several responses followed on from those others previously posted. Internally, all contributions were made available to staff, and external suggestions informed the early thinking about new programmes and priorities. However there was not a systematic way of ensuring that every contribution was considered by all those to whom it might have been relevant.

In sum, 'PHF should...' was a valuable exercise which has contributed to the strategic review process, and from which there is much to learn and share – both internally and externally.

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Paul Hamlyn was an entrepreneurial publisher and philanthropist, committed to offering new opportunities and experiences for less fortunate members of society. During his lifetime, and because of his experiences, he had a particular interest in social justice, challenging prejudice and opening up the arts and education to everyone, but particularly to young people.

In 1987 he established the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for general charitable purposes. Since then, we have continuously supported charitable activities that have enabled individuals, particularly children and young people, to experience a better quality of life.

Our mission is to help people overcome disadvantage and lack of opportunity, so that they can realise their potential and enjoy fulfilling and creative lives. We have a particular interest in supporting young people and a strong belief in the importance of the arts.

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