

## **Collaborate project proposals**

**Rising Arts Agency** <https://rising.org.uk/>

### **What do you want to explore and why?**

We would like to research the value of truly equitable cultural sector partnerships in creating radical social change. We want to explore the power imbalances that are often at play in partnerships between funders or institutions and smaller grassroots organisations like ours, that hinders real inclusion work.

Evidence shows that more diverse companies are more successful (Source: Diversity Wins report McKinsey) and so Arts Council England (see ACE Investment Principle: Inclusivity and Relevance) and other funders are pushing for more representation at board, team and audience level but there's little investigation into how these changes are being made.

From our experience, this inclusion work is often done by smaller, non-National Portfolio Organisations, to increase visible representation or engagement of communities who are underrepresented in the sector. By outsourcing this work, the partnerships created are not always equal or fit-for-purpose. One partner often holds the power and maintains the funder status-quo and the other does the slow inclusion work of embedded engagement, often alongside the labour of their personal lived experience. The smaller organisation often finds themselves working in service of the larger institution, which has a more traditional approach and more resources.

There is minimal research into this specific area of focus and we aim to investigate how more equitable partnerships could lead to more cultural value for the sector, underrepresented creatives, institutions and funders. This would include defining equitable partnerships around markers of shared resources, collective power and how the people who are doing this difficult and often traumatising work on behalf of institutions can be protected and honoured within these relationships. By defining what equitable partnerships are and the value they hold, we hope to communicate this to the wider sector and support real change that matters.

We are a genuinely youth-led social enterprise whose mission is to support Bristol's underrepresented young people aged 18 to 30 to fulfil their creative ambitions, empower themselves and to affect wider cultural change through the arts. Established in 2016 we increasingly operate not just locally and regionally but nationally, as our unique ways of working, thinking and facilitating become more recognised. We advocate for sector and cultural change through campaigns, research projects, industry consultation and our creative agency services.

In our work we often walk the line between working to 'change' the sector and being exhausted and traumatised by the constant microaggressions, performative change and surface-level investment we encounter. Our team reflects the diverse lived experiences of our community; being 85% 30 and under, 46% people of colour, 77% women and 23% LGBTQI+. This means we

are often personally affected by what we experience as inequitable partnerships with the sector.

This research would allow us to articulate the impact that these past experiences have had on the team, identify the facets of truly equitable cultural partnerships and evidence why they are instrumental to creating the change we want to see. We want to see underrepresented young people respected in the sector - for their creativity, artistic skill, lived experience and strategic vision. Young people have the knowledge and insight to radically shift our cities and creative industries towards true cooperation and inclusion - not just in the future, but now.

We want to see creative problem-solving recognised and regularly used in cultural sector partnerships as well as other sectors (for example, in policy and housing) and this research could provide key evidence towards that. The models of co-creation used by Rising Arts Agency and other similar organisations allow for open-ended system design that could put creativity at the heart of our society.

## **What are you looking for in an academic research partner?**

In working with our academic research partner, we are looking to model an equitable partnership, where we can pool our expertise and learn from each other. Rising has developed ways of working that celebrates reflection, curiosity, access and disrupting the status-quo, and we hope that any researcher working with us would help us refine our ways of sharing that with the sector and beyond.

This investigation could be done through facilitating the Rising team to reflect; interviewing members of our community, institutions who have participated in partnership work (equitable and not) and funders, and potentially working towards a model or toolkit of best practice that can be embedded in Rising's work and shared with the sector.

We expect that whoever we partner with is sensitive to the fact that we wouldn't want to alienate our existing community and audiences with inaccessible, academic jargon and will strive to co-create ways of communicating our findings in inclusive and radical ways.

We hope to work with someone who is proactive and equally excited by this work as we are. It would be preferable to work with an academic researcher with personal or lived experience of the research we're looking to do, who can bring their own insight into the work and co-create it with us. Previous work with a student from Bristol University's data course brought a specialism in anthropology and alternative culture, and lived experience to our *Whose Culture Is It Anyway?* project. Their insight into how to collect, aggregate and read data was invaluable for our innovative engagement work and the resulting report we created. We would love to emulate this and would value a researcher with a background in either sociology, anthropology and/or culture studies, who understands how power works and strives towards a de-colonialist academic practice.