

Module

How to Siphon Private Funds

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The tension between those who believe in changing the system from the inside and those who believe that we need to create an entirely new system, is a well-worn debate. However, moving beyond binaries forces us to work in the space where both are already happening at once (and both may be necessary). Siphoning, and redistributing private wealth is one proposed antidote that experts in commoning spaces espouse. If government funding is highly competitive, forces people to reproduce their own disenfranchisement, and prioritizes projects that are 'innovative' but not disruptive, perhaps a more Robin Hood approach is possible, and it can start with a few key tactics.

1
Get paid for the work you do, but make sure you redistribute where you can

1

2
Use 'big' clients to help fund smaller projects

2

3
Think through commoning as a set of resistant and resilient practices, rather than a structure

3

4
Take into account what you are paying for that isn't necessary

4

5
Consider the pitfalls of private philanthropy and how to help organisations die

5

7
Use the market as it is to make interest on existing money (and question the inherent 'right' to do this)

7

6
Invest beyond banks

6

Many organisations do this instinctively. The idea is that those clients (or funders, or supporters) who bring more revenue into your organisation will pay enough that you can also fund a smaller project that may not bring in a lot (or any) money. You're essentially making one wealthy client redistribute their funds to help smaller (and often more disruptive) projects.

Most of us engage in both paid and unpaid labour of some sort. The key is to make sure you get paid for the labour you do or, rather, to get value from your labour. Yet redistribution is also central. Since we are siphoning from private wealth and not attempting to emulate it, we must also hold ourselves accountable for hoarding wealth.

Resources

Redistribution can come in the form of...

1. Mutual aid: Dean Spade's [book](#) is a great start!
2. Self-taxing within your organisation or community (see self tax in blue section).
3. Reparations: on a bit of a break now but the Underground Plant Trade is a great [example](#) of this.
4. Try this Equitable Salary [Matrix](#) from Joy as Resistance.

Structurally you may be a cooperative, a community land trust, or any other formal entity. However, the commons is a way of doing underpinned by a set of shared values and/or responsibilities. This does not mean everyone within a commons will share the ethical, political, or philosophical stance, but it does mean that there is agreement on the value of commoning and a means of agreeing on sustainable practices.

Resources

1. [How to Buy an Oil Company](#).
2. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's [book](#) *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*.
3. [Inspiration](#) from the life of John Lewis.

We don't want to put personal onus on structural problems, but rather suggest that we have all been convinced by institutions (legal, educational, and otherwise) that there are certain 'things' you need (e.g. paperwork, titles, certificates). It's worth thinking through what is really significant for your organisation or group to operate.

Resources

1. Some breakdown of various legal forms and existing organisational types [here](#) for reference.

Private philanthropy is increasingly, if surprisingly, being mentioned by many practitioners and organisers as an alternative to government grants. This isn't meant to support private wealth accumulation or its (often nefarious) origins. The statement by Lankelly Chase (2023) addresses exactly these problems and they aim to distribute the remainder of their assets and dissolve over the next five years. - Still, siphoning money from private philanthropy is also not a replacement for mutual aid or new economic models. It may, in fact, be an institution we can let die.

Resources

1. [Lankelly Chase Letter](#)
2. [On helping organisations die](#)

Alternatives for managing funds, lending, or other forms of business support are out there, even if it does take a bit of time to figure out who aligns with your values and actions. We suggest looking at all the possibilities, while considering the benefits of other forms of funding (e.g. CDFIs (Community Development Finance Institutions), cooperative banks, credit unions, and co-op specific business support).

Resources

1. [Co-op finance service \(CFDI\)](#)
2. [Co-op bank](#)
3. [Co-op business support](#)

As one of the experts we consulted suggested, it's difficult to shake the notion that if you have money, you have an inherent right to make more money off it. This desire to 'invest' affects organisations too and has obvious knock-on effects for how who is seen as 'valuable' enough to be worthy of funding. While we may be embedded in an 'investment culture', think about how long-term income that is dependent on the system as it can be redistributed, short-term, or just generally 'bite the hand that feeds it'.

Resources

1. An example of working off investments: [Telluride Association](#)

Module

How to Make Disruption Fun

What's the point in building a new world if it isn't any fun to be in?
Creating, sustaining and growing communities that work within but against the status quo is hard work, but it can also be joyous. If we take care seriously, we must also take fun seriously.

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Focus on building and/or bettering civil society groups

1

Thinking through the principles of commoning infrastructures, complicating the notions of citizenship and relationality, and simply spending time with people (and more-than-humans) in groups of shared interest can be fun. Not all socio-political engagement needs to feel high stakes. Give yourself some time to imagine how common resources and abandonment of existing forms of ownership could add joy to you and those around you.

Resources

1. [Radical Civics](#)

Consider a 'no-shit work' model

2

Courtesy of the Post-Growth Institute comes a no-shit work model (if you don't want to do something, you don't) that not only ensures peoples' creativity and strengths are valued, but also reinforces agency. Of course, the obvious question is what about the jobs no one wants to do? This evolves into a discussion on what is really necessary to function as an organisation or group. There are also wider questions about the social division of labour and how 'shit work' more broadly is distributed in (gendered and racialised ways) in the economy. Weeding out these issues can happen on a case-by-case basis, but one helpful tip is to create a strengths map for each member and review it annually or at another regular interval.

Resources

1. [Embodied Leadership](#)
2. Feminist Theorist Nancy Fraser's work on Cannibal Capitalism presents an accessible entry point to processes and practices of exploitation and expropriation in the economy.

Encourage imagination and play

3

Encourage imagination and play within your community. Sometimes this is as easy as giving people a tactile activity to do during meetings or dedicating an hour to eat food and chat. Ask the big questions. What kind of world do you want to see? Provide alternative narratives. What could this public space be used for that doesn't involve commercial enterprises? Inspiration can be found across interests and fields, so dedicate time to imagining otherwise.

Resources

1. [Public Works](#)
2. [FurtherField](#)

Acknowledge and value the 'invisible' work

4

Ideally, no one's efforts, whether they're volunteer hours or the everyday maintenance of shared space, would go unnoticed. Still, making a point to acknowledge the value of someone's time and effort goes a long way. This might mean pushing away from volunteerism, or making 'invisible' tasks visible and coordinating people accordingly. However you choose to do it, appreciating someone can reinforce responsibility and relationality, which is foundational to any organisation or community.

Resources

1. [On Gratitude in the Workplace](#)

"Formalise" fun

5

Include joy as resistance into your principles, manifesto, or other central documents. Joy is disruptive in exploitative systems. When you centre it in everything you do, along with more 'serious' aims, you give it gravity and help to prevent certain pressures that lead to burnout. At the same time, make sure all your central principles are clear and accessible for any new members.

Resources

1. [Healing and Joy as Resistance](#)
2. [Check out the Joy as Resistance Employee Handbook](#)

Be serious about wellbeing

6

If you understand the significance of supporting wellbeing but still find high levels of burnout there might be a disconnect in the way that you want to operate and the way that you do. Sometimes this is due to bigger structural norms, the very kind your organisation may want to work against. Sometimes it's due to internal or external competition. Still, embedding a concept of commons health and wellbeing into your everyday work and your team is a great way to show that wellbeing is more than just a buzzword. Check out the School of Commoning's workshops and team for inspiration.

Resources

1. [Climate Emergence](#)
2. [School of Commoning](#)

Invest in time together

7

Invest in time together to develop interests which might not seem directly related to the work you're doing, give people something to do with their hands, and feed each other. Building trust is essential in any community of people and trust can't be built if you don't spend time with one another. Setting up weekly, monthly or even bi-weekly, no or low-pressure chats that people want to go to may seem obvious but there are so many groups that don't make it enough of a priority.

Module

How to Wean off Grant Dependency and Create Collective Pots

Collective pots of money are a fundamental part of community building and certainly not a new idea, but they can help us build something new. That is, understanding how shared resources, exchange and support can function within, yet contrary to, the capitalist market as it is now. It's important to remember that this has been and continues to be a core feature of communities across the globe and learning about this in person, beyond our module, is key.

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1
Self-tax and create collective pots of money

Creating shared pots of money can be a one-off event or a consistent practice, in which case it becomes a sort of self-tax. There are several ways to do this. You may want to source through crowdfunding efforts, community shares, or simple recurring payments to a democratically managed community fund, akin to Solidfund, My Cool Class, or the CultureBanked model. Focusing on creative work that is made, stored or represented digitally, 'CultureBanking' hopes to help artists retain IP and yet connect to the commons by banking communal digital rights, which then refund community activities. While there are many different options for joint funds, the value systems that uphold them must support sustainability.

Resources

1. [Good Finance](#)
2. [Solid Fund](#)
3. [My Cool Class](#)
4. [Culture Banked](#)
5. A database of tools for collaborative funding from DarkMatter Labs.

2
Work as a cooperative, not a charity

There are many benefits to working as a charity, including certain tax breaks, but to truly create cohesion, reliability and mutual care requires a rejection of the paternalism and hierarchies inherent to charity work. While cooperatives are not the only responses to charities, the notion of democratic member control, solidarity and autonomy are key values that can be enacted across organisations working on equitable practices.

Resources

1. [The Cooperative College](#)
2. [Training for Co-op advisors](#)

3
Think through your value system, including and beyond monetary value

4
Create a federation of funders who would build a shared pot

David Graeber's anthropological work on the notion of value as the importance of actions, and Nancy Munn's work on creative action and the transformation of value are great places to start when considering what we mean by 'value' beyond money. For more practical applications we can tease out the ideas behind Gross National Happiness or think through other forms of 'value capture'. We've even provided the Cambridge Value Mapping tool below to play with these concepts. Working through their activity might help you articulate how your organisation or group has 'invested otherwise' and help prove or clarify the usefulness of thinking beyond capital as value.

Resources

1. [David Graeber](#)
2. [The Fame of Gawa](#)
3. [Bhutan Wealth - Happiness Counts](#)
4. [The Cambridge Value Mapping Tool - Institute for Manufacturing \(IfM\)](#)

5
Consider the merits of creating a DAO

6
Be a grant giver instead of seeking out grants

7
Create a non-monetary system of exchange

A DAO, or Decentralised Autonomous Organisation, is a decentralised and member owned organisation that employs smart contracts on a blockchain network. While there are conversations to be had about co-opting and technocrats, as well as how these technologies are subject to the same techno-optimism as those that have gone before them, there is space for those who want to use these tech tools to work against existing institutions. Still, it's important to not ignore the real, material impacts and complicated relationship to ownership and accountability.

Resources

1. [Feminist Strategies for P2P](#)
2. [Factory DAO](#)
3. [nfts](#)

Resources

1. [Solid Fund](#)
2. Check out resources for Funding and Partnership Agreements, as well as Grantmaking Practices [here](#)

It's easy to forget that funders themselves are also competing to get the 'best projects'. They also need to respond to questions of 'impact', creating tensions where there might otherwise be cooperation. One way to change this might be to have funders pool their financial resources together and create a large pot of money that could be used to find great projects and provide each funder with the benefits of the project's impact.

This may seem a bit contradictory, but you don't have to start with a huge sum of money. Even having a small grant available builds your reputation as an organisation, and giving to significant and disruptive projects and people might even bring more money in from those who appreciate the work you're doing and want to see you fund more brilliant work. More importantly, you get to decide the terms of engagement and think radically about what grants should look like. You could try setting up a no questions asked scholarship like The Post-Growth Institute or look for projects that are long-term and disruptive. You can even repurpose that time you would have spent on grant writing for conversations about truly collaborative funding.

Resources

1. [Kendra IO](#)
2. No questions asked grant giving from [Post Growth](#). For an example see their [scholarship application](#)

Another well-trialled practice that has many benefits is creating a system of exchange not based on money. Some do this as a time banking model, where expertise shared with one person earns you a token of sorts, that can then be used to employ someone else's expertise. Another example of this is the Offers and Needs Market, where goods, services, and care are distributed through a virtual or in person session. Though some of the more resilient initiatives in this space have petered out, it does not need a formal entity to enact and is based on fundamental human interactions.

Resources

1. [Trade School](#)
2. [Economy of Hours](#)
3. [Offers and Needs](#)