

## More than money: the art of investment

HARP's approach to non-financial support

by Rosie Dow, HARP Programme Manager

HARP launched in 2020 with a call for teams of arts and health collaborators to apply for both funding, in the form of a grant, and support to deliver their arts and health innovation projects.

That non-financial support has been a crucial element of HARP's success - for every £1 paid out in grants, it invested a further £1 in non-financial support, and 50p on research - and a key recommendation for potential arts and health investors of the future is that they consider how they can offer something similar, to better support the needs of the projects and people they are working with at each innovation stage.

### Why non-financial support for innovators is so important

Anyone can have a good idea, but the innovation process is about how those ideas come to life, have a positive impact and survive. It takes time for successful innovators to evidence their success, learn from failures and use that knowledge to grow their innovation to reach more people.

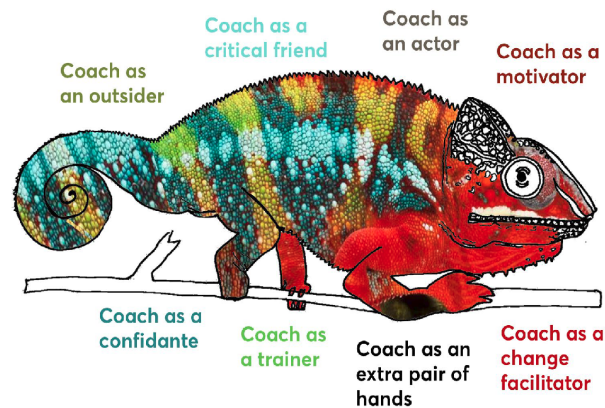
HARP sprang from a belief by its partners that navigating this requires not just money but commitment, collaboration and tenacity from both innovation teams and investors. This proved to be true, particularly when creating partnerships between arts and health practitioners with different (even opposing) ways of working, languages and systems.

To ensure HARP showed that commitment, and that it generated practical learning regarding what it takes for arts ideas to seed, survive and thrive in health and care systems, the HARP team worked alongside the HARP innovators in the following ways.

#### 1. Coaching

'Coaching' in the context of HARP meant the HARP team (programme manager Rosie Dow; programme coordinator, Jessica Clark; and senior consultant, Charlene ) being on-hand to help people and teams find solutions to challenges that arose, realise opportunities and shift mindsets to unlock new ways of working. The aim was always to surface what was going on for the innovation projects and help individuals involved find a positive way forward. This often meant trying something

new, asking somebody for help, or exploring different perspectives. Exploring different perspectives took many forms: troubleshooting, mediating, providing professional advice, making connections, and even being an extra pair of hands. At the heart of this was listening, and allowing the teams to lead the conversation to a place that was useful for them. While all members of the coaching team were formally trained, conversations between them and innovation teams were not formalised. The coaching was not about training people or imparting knowledge. Building good relationships and trust with the teams was crucial, though this was not always easy given HARP's status as funder. HARP created safe spaces for people to candidly share challenges with us, without risking their funding agreements (see 'flexibility' below).



*The Chameleon Coach from [People Powered Results](#)*

## 2. Flexibility

Grant funders love a process - guidelines, application forms, monitoring questions, milestones. And often for good reasons, to ensure charitable or public funds are spent wisely. However, HARP intentionally applied a degree of flexibility to all these measures. For example, it made it easy for teams to change payment timings, targets and partners, and kept reporting requirements to a minimum. Our coaching relationships helped make this possible, as it meant our HARP team generally knew whether innovators were on track without having to ask and could anticipate delays and challenges. We could also trust that they were looking for solutions and help them to do so, limiting the risk of any project 'falling behind'. This approach took time for the innovation teams to adapt to, but we kept them focused on goals (not outputs). We reinforced the message that their 'big picture' ambition to help people was more important than what they did and how they did it. We also made it safe to fail by asking 'what did you learn?' rather than 'what did you do?'. We encouraged innovators to value learning, knowing that everybody can benefit from the knowledge that both successes and failures generate.

## 3. Collective learning (and collective action)

Pre-HARP mapping of innovation in arts and health revealed several key barriers: evidence, referral pathways, health partnerships, funding models, and scaling. HARP set out to learn about these things in real-time so that we could apply the learning immediately to help the innovators, enabling them to decide how best to approach their projects, what shifts to make, and who to ask for help.

HARP 'learning groups' were formed, simple online workshops centred on key learning topics that were run in partnership with the Wales Arts, Health and Wellbeing Network. We held one a week on a different topic for one year. Around 10 members of the different innovation projects would come along each time to explore their wins and challenges and consider what could be done to set them up for success. Sometimes, guest speakers joined or breakout rooms were used to encourage sharing of experiences between projects in smaller groups. Connections were built that facilitated everyone learning together what could be done to set arts and health innovators up for success. That knowledge has now been synthesised and evolved into our HARP approach and recommendations. These workshops harnessed and generated collective power and knowledge, while providing peer support to innovators navigating complex work in health settings, during a pandemic.

#### **4. Research**

We know that in health systems you need good evidence that an idea works before you can embed and scale it. Dr Sofia Vougioukalou, a research fellow at Y Lab (Cardiff University), has therefore been vital to HARP's approach. As well as supporting teams to build their evidence, she is generating research papers and evidence reviews. In the next few months, she will be meta-analysing the 13 teams' evaluation reports to produce data on the collective impact of the programme and contribute to the wider evidence base. She has also interviewed innovators from across the teams to gather valuable insights on arts and health processes. Sofia's findings also bolster the practical learnings reflected in our HARP approach and recommendations, giving them more weight with policy makers, health leaders and other key stakeholders.

#### **5. Evaluation advice and support**

Our coaching relationships allowed us to quickly identify common challenges across the projects, such as when innovators were under-resourced or experiencing a lack of confidence, and provide additional support. Evaluation was a key area. Dr Vougioukalou advised teams on their evaluation plans, connected them with professional evaluators and PhD students, and gave seminars on specific topics related to evaluation, such as validated scales and public involvement. She even produced a literature review for each of the teams so that they could understand the evidence base for their work. It became clear that, at times, it was difficult for teams to find capacity to engage in all of the evidence-related support offered. We also quickly realised that even ring-fencing a minimum of 10 percent of the budget to evaluation did not give the teams enough money to outsource it properly or engage with academic institutions. However, it was clear that the teams were grateful for the support and many took a more methodical approach to evaluation than perhaps they otherwise would have. It is hoped they will take these learnings forward into all areas of their arts and health work.

## 6. Structured innovation support (HARP Seed only)

We offered this comprehensive support across all HARP programme strands (Sprint, Seed and Nourish). Additionally in the Sprint and Seed strands of the HARP programme, which involved supporting new teams at the start of their innovation journeys, we also offered workshops, activities and templates (combined with coaching) to give them a structured process to follow. We took them through clear stages: defining their health challenge, setting goals, team building, idea generation and selection, testing, learning and evaluating. This built on a proven way of working for HARP partner, People Powered Results, which draws on what we know about the conditions needed for seeding impactful ideas in health and care settings – namely a willingness to experiment, sponsorship and permission, access to data, urgency and co-production.

We also ensured the teams involved health leaders, people with lived experience, and researchers in early conversations. We believe that this broad involvement from the beginning helps teams be more informed, embedded in existing systems and supported. Building strong partnerships was one of HARP's objectives, and health leaders' sponsorship was crucial, since they provided permission for the health collaborators to attend HARP workshops and dedicate time to the HARP projects. It's important to note that the health partners were not paid by HARP for their involvement in the project. This solidified their commitment to making innovation happen. Doing this with multiple teams at the same time also helped build momentum and provided teams with peer support.

### What we learned

HARP has been rich with learning. Some of this learning has been captured through Dr Vougioukalou's research, the HARP Approach and related recommendations. We hope that these will have the potential to convince health leaders, policy makers and the public how important the arts are for our health and wellbeing and to support more arts and health innovation, benefiting more people, in the future. We also hope they will help partners and others to evolve their investment practices and see the benefit of providing non-financial support. We know that doing so is not easy, it requires openness, vulnerability and a willingness to place importance on the 'grey' areas (relationship building, partnerships, listening). In the case of HARP, it began with our team being open to trying a different way of working with a funder, and our investors and partners being open to supporting this. We didn't always get things right, and we know some of the HARP teams found our approach challenging at times. However, many told us they have found value in the space, support and new networks HARP has provided.

Innovation is about finding new and better solutions, and as investors we must create a culture of learning, collaboration and creativity. If we don't, how will change ever be possible?