

fractals co-op

a selection of projects



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About us

We're experts at supporting organisations making radical social change across a variety of sectors. We use a toolbox of methods from across facilitation, research, and design to help us act as a critical friend to organisations across the public and third sector. Our practice is rooted in anti-oppressive facilitation, systems change, and participatory design, and we draw from these distinct approaches to craft a bespoke approach for each individual project we work on.

Our training in speculative design and futures workshops makes us adept at helping organisations to think about the worlds they are trying to build through their work. At the same time, our strong research background enables us to do rigorous and strategic work. We're at our best when we're unpacking problems, gathering groups together, and helping them to work towards new possibilities. Co-production and co-design are at the heart of everything we do, holding ourselves and our clients accountable to foregrounding lived experience in our work.

We work on a principle of "good enough for now, safe enough to try", and we encourage our clients to do the same rather than getting stuck continuously working on the same problems. We want to see a world where people are able to have comfortable and healthy conversations around competing values or conflicting goals, and we use our facilitation experience to craft engagement processes where everyone's voice can be meaningfully heard. We have worked with teams amidst digital transformation, strategic development, organisational crisis, and service redesign, and our clients have ranged from the smallest of charities to national governments.

Prior work

We are a worker's co-operative of four people with expertise across facilitation, research and evaluation, and interaction and service design. We are a non-hierarchical organisation that uses [sociocracy](#) to make decisions. We have worked and volunteered inside a wide variety of organisations, such as:

- Community groups (facilitating them in their early, forming stages),
- Small charities (as small as 4 employees and as large as 25),
- National charities,
- Campaigning organisations (including charities, trade unions, political parties, and student's unions)
- Local authorities,
- National governments/civil services, and
- Universities.

Our prior work has included:

Creating a new vision and a theory of change during a time of crisis. During the first COVID-19 lockdown, we supported a leadership team inside of a large national charity to create and align around a new vision, mission, values and theory of change in service of a long-term strategy. At the time, the team was experiencing significant conflict about these. Through a series of workshops, we held space for them to safely engage in conflict with each other. Drawing on our anti-oppressive and transformative approach to facilitation, we helped the team to reconnect with each other, express conflict they were holding around the team's values and vision, and agree upon a way forward together. We created a theory of change that set a bold vision, reflected the team's practice and which made clear the gaps in their current work, prompting the team to create new strands of work. Against a backdrop of changing service provision due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the engagement process re-unified the team, ensuring they were able to productively work together, and has led to a smoother communication and greater impact for the team in the years since.

Changing policy through visionary facilitation. We hosted an event that guided 85 care-experienced young people and social care workers (who had never met before) through a process to imagine shared visions of the future. We developed bespoke methods for building empathy between strangers and used a custom card game to support them to connect with each other. Across diverse lived experiences, ages, and professions, we created a shared vision of the future, and worked with partners in public policy to turn this into actionable policy recommendations. These policy recommendations formed the basis of a national charity's election influencing strategy, with parliamentary candidates endorsing pledges that were developed from these visions of the future.

Supporting people to engage in participatory budgeting. Working with an international non-profit, we facilitated participatory budgeting workshops with a number of Scottish local authorities and community groups. We explored the introduction of digital tools and platforms into traditional in-person participatory budgeting processes, which presented steep learning

curves and challenges to stakeholders' status quo. We guided people through discomfort, uncertainty and disagreement to reach consensus and agreed ways of working collaboratively. It was also a chance to introduce a diverse group of people to the beauty of data protection, being 'consentful' organisations, and the rich service development and relationship building opportunities afforded through transparent communication about participatory budgeting processes. With our support, citizen engagement in participatory budgeting across partner councils increased and stakeholders were able to directly influence procurement of digital platforms.

Facilitating local authorities to make systems change. We successfully guided multi-stakeholder local authority teams with a diverse portfolio of responsibilities to coalesce around a shared vision for systems change for children's social care. Prior to our intervention, these teams were increasingly atomised, unable to effectively collaborate, and were full of unexpressed resentment. We supported the team to identify commonalities in their individual visions for systems change and effectively helped them to co-operate to create an implementation plan for this vision. Working with us helped the group to express latent tension that had been building for years and which was slowing the development of any shared vision, allowing them to effectively move past internal bureaucracy.

Holding Liberating Structures immersions. We have co-designed and delivered various day-long immersions for people in public services to experience and learn Liberating Structures, a facilitation/workshop design framework that allows maximum participation and enhances relational coordination and trust. As part of a festival celebrating creativity and innovation in public services, and in collaboration with organised Liberating Structures practitioner groups, we have helped guide hundreds of people in public service workforces to experience ways to be inclusive, caring and to actively listen in their own meetings and workshops. Immersions require a high level of digital workshop planning and delivery skills, as well as power literacy and trauma informed approaches.

Supporting gig worker advocacy by designing bespoke engagement tools. We developed a set of bespoke design probes (including maps, diaries, and photos) to understand the experiences of gig economy workers (who work for food platforms such as Deliveroo and UberEats). We then used this research data to develop a toolkit for couriers to collect and analyse their own data to better communicate their experiences to public officials and policymakers focusing on digital strategies around cities and work.

Creating shared language across cultures. We designed and facilitated workshops bringing artists together in two UNESCO Cities of Design- Dundee in Scotland and Kobe in Japan. The Small Society Lab brought people together to imagine the future of cities. This workshop design required a creative approach to help people with limited shared verbal language to communicate and work together online. With the use of image cards, invitations to create metaphors, and imagining non-human futures in cities, the artists were able to share stories about their cities and imagine the future of their cities together. Participants reported feeling a closer bond between the two cities and a sense of connectedness which was particularly valuable during the pandemic. The unique format of the workshop stayed with many of the participants and affected their thinking afterward.

Facilitating anti-racism training workshops. We designed and delivered workshops for a Scottish college focussed on understanding what being anti-racist means in everyday work. This facilitation required careful navigation of white fragility and disagreements about whether college policies could be modified to demonstrate a commitment to anti-racism and wider inclusion. Designing the right discussion structures, prompts and ground rules were crucial to preserving and even enhancing relationships between the workshop participants.

Workshop design and facilitation for a government discovery project. After the creation of a new strategy, we supported a government client to discover more about the needs of their stakeholders. Working in collaboration with the client to develop the brief, we helped the client align around shared values and purpose after a lack of clarity emerged early in the facilitation process. From there, we designed workshop structures, activities that helped participants to share their experiences, and held workshops with a variety of stakeholders. We synthesised the workshop findings and helped the client deepen their strategic foresight and stakeholder engagement plans.

Get in touch

If you've read something you're curious about here, we'd love to have a chat. This doesn't have to be 'we have some work we'd like you to do' - this could be 'I'd love to hear more about that project', 'I don't get what you do', or 'can you help me work out what the problem is here?'

We love meeting fellow travellers and are always happy to spend an hour with you. We're a worker's co-operative of four people: Leah, Kieran, Oliver and Hazel, and you're likely to meet with at least two of us. On a project, two of us run 'front of house', working with you in meetings and events, whilst another of us is working 'back of house', collaborating on desk research, workshop plans, and feeding back on how the project is going.

Want to chat? Email us on hello@fractals.coop and tell us what's got you stuck right now.