**Culture Mile Learning** 

**Fusion Prize Process Evaluation** 

December 2020

**BOP** Consulting



#### **Summary findings**

#### Who engaged with the prize and what were their experiences of the different points of engagement?

- The Prize received applications from 66 teams, comprising a total of 271 individuals from a broad range of professional backgrounds
- The pre-submissions events created networking opportunities, stimulated creativity
- Stronger applicants had a greater level of overall engagement with the Prize

#### What is the wider impact of the Prize and to what extent did the Prize cultivate a community of practice among those who engaged?

- Unsuccessful applicants, non-applicants, and the judging panel all reported benefits arising from their involvement with the prize
- Research participants were open to continued engagement and support from the Fusion Prize team

#### Did the Prize offer value for money?

- There was a sense from stakeholders and judges that the Fusion Prize achieved a lot for relatively little money
- The Culture Mile Learning team are commissioning an evaluation to understand the value for money of the £50,000 direct investment

#### What were the outcomes and lessons learned from the partnership between Culture Mile Learning and the Foundation for Future London?

- The partnership was a valuable learning experience for both FFL and CML. Both organisations were able to access new audiences and develop new approaches to creative learning and skills development
- More clarity around expectations from the partnership at the outset would have helped both organisations in planning for the Prize

#### How did the prize help to evolve the strategies of Culture Mile and Culture Mile Learning?

 Engagement with the Prize has contributed a positive case and higher profile for Culture Mile's work around social mobility and creative learning, and has helped to advance strategy in this area

#### What is the coherence of the prize and how does it all fit together?

- The Fusion Prize was understood as a unique proposition by applicants, judges and stakeholders, especially within the cultural and creative sector
- However, the complexity and/or novelty of the model caused challenges when it came to communicating and publicising the Prize

#### The Fusion Prize

Culture Mile and Foundation for Future London launched the inaugural Fusion Prize in June 2019. It was a 'Challenge Prize', putting out a public call for solutions with a prize of £50,000 awarded to help the winners pilot their proposal. The prize aimed to use creativity to upskill future generations and develop 'fusion skills' for the modern workplace: communication, thinking, organisational and creative skills.

The challenge statement presented for the prize was:

'What new ideas can demonstrate how engagement with creativity and culture can help young Londoners develop the skills they need for the 21st century workplace?'

The prize was open to any UK-based team or individual. Interested parties were invited to three symposia events which took place September – November 2019.

The events were designed to introduce the prize, stimulate ideas, and facilitate networking between potential applicants.

The prize received 66 applications, from which six finalists were selected. Finalists received £1,000 each to develop their proposals in advance of pitching to the judging panel in October 2020. Due to the advent of the pandemic, pitching took place online, five months later than originally planned.

Alongside symposia events, applicants were offered proposal advice sessions and workshops throughout the process.

The prize was awarded to *The Pattern*, an alternative curriculum for young people aged over 18 and no longer in full time education to access the creative and cultural industries.



3 symposia events



**67** applications





#### **Evaluation**

#### **Research Aims**

In March 2020, BOP Consulting was appointed to evaluate how effectively the delivery process of the Fusion Prize has met its objectives. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- Who engaged with the prize and what were their experiences of the different points of engagement?
- What is the wider impact of the Prize and to what extent did the Prize cultivate a community of practice among those who engaged?
- Did the Prize offer value for money?
- What were the outcomes and lessons learned from the partnership between Culture Mile Learning and the Foundation for Future London?
- How did the prize help to evolve the strategies of Culture Mile and Culture Mile Learning?
- What is the coherence of the prize and how does it all fit together?

#### Methodology

The evaluation is based on the following data sources:

- Application forms and shortlisting data
- Event attendee data
- Symposia attendee focus groups x 2 (1 x applicant focus group, 1 x non-applicant focus group)
- Symposia attendee survey (n = 7)
- Strategic stakeholder interviews x 3
- Fusion Prize judges interviews x 3
- Finalist interviews x 3

### Who applied for the Fusion Prize?

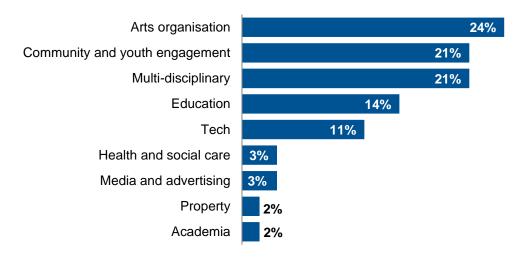
The Prize received applications from **67 teams**, comprising a total of **271 individuals**.

The average team size was 4, and teams ranged from 1 to 20 team members.

Fusion Prize teams came from a variety of sectors.

The figure below summaries the occupational backgrounds described by teams in their applications.

Figure 1 Occupational backgrounds of applicant teams



- 48% teams had been working together for at least two years prior to their application
- 18% of teams were newly established in order to enter the Prize and a further 21% of teams were less than two years old
- 13% first stage applications were from individuals rather than teams

Amongst the finalists, all had experience of working together prior to their application, although this varied between experience of working on their specific initiative, working collaboratively on other projects, and working as colleagues for different organisations.

### Who engaged with the Fusion Prize events?

Between June – December 2019, the Fusion Prize hosted a launch event, three major symposia events, and some focused proposal advice sessions. All events were free to attend. The table below shows the number of sign-ups and attendees to each event:

**Figure 2 Event Attendance** 

Event	Sign ups	Attendees	Attendance rate
Prize launch	69	N/A*	N/A*
THE NEED	269	219	81%
THE HOW	130	105	81%
THE TEST	120	90	75%
Proposal advice session	22	22	100%

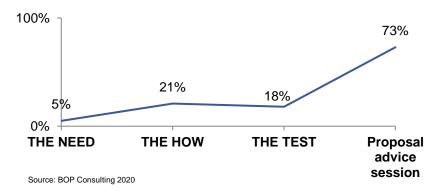
Source: BOP Consulting 2020

The proportion of symposia attendees who went on to apply for the Prize rose considerably between the initial and subsequent two symposia events, despite a drop in overall numbers of attendees.

This trend continued at the proposal advice sessions. All 22 sessions were filled with a 100% attendance rate. Just under three quarters of attendees at these sessions proceeded to apply for the Prize.

This suggests that the process cultivated a smaller but more focused community of engagement through the series of presubmission events.

Figure 3 Percentage of attendees who applied for the prize



While the overall objective behind the events was to garner and develop proposals for the Prize, feedback from event attendees indicated that the symposia were also valuable to those who didn't apply (see page 14). Therefore failure to submit an application should not necessarily be considered a negative outcome.

Light-touch demographic data collected at the point of signup would help the Fusion Prize team to get a better understanding of which groups engaged with the presubmission events and how applicant journeys may have differed between groups.



Image credit: Culture Mile Learn

# How effective were the Fusion Prize symposia?

- Symposia created beneficial networking opportunities but participants would have liked more time to network
- Opportunities to get feedback on proposals especially from young people – was valuable
- Symposia increased understanding of the Prize and what it was looking for
- Events were described as diverse and welcoming to people from all backgrounds, although they could have been more widely publicised
- Judges and panellists also benefitted through attendance
- Programmes were 'full' and 'vibrant' but some participants felt the programme could have been simplified

Feedback regarding the symposia events was broadly positive from both applicants and non-applicants. Participants particularly welcomed the opportunity to network and share ideas with a broad range of attendees.

Several participants would have liked more time set aside to meet and speak to (both formally and informally) other potential applicants during the events. I think the diversity of people who were at the events was actually very impressive. I think there was a really wide range of organisation and individuals and different sorts of organisations and lots of ideas bouncing around.

The opportunity to get feedback on ideas and proposals, both from Fusion Prize judges and from the youth panel, was appreciated. The presence of young people was highlighted as particularly beneficial. This was the group that applicants most commonly identified as needing support to reach and connect with.

**66** There was a youth group there, I told them what my project was about and I got really good feedback from them. So that was the most useful.

Participants reported developing a better understanding of what the prize was looking for through attending the symposia and being able to focus their proposals as a result.

**66** The events definitely helped me to develop my idea. Before, it was about 50% there but it was through the symposiums mainly and through people's feedback that helped me to refine it and simplify it.

# How effective were the Fusion Prize symposia?

Participants who addressed the range of people at the events were positive about the diversity and inclusivity of the symposia. Participants spoke of feeling comfortable and welcome.

- One young person in particular was from an from underrepresented group [..] she came up to me and said she felt really, really welcomed, she said she felt incredibly comfortable, considering she suffers with mental health issues. She actually felt that she got a lot out of it herself.
- 66 I saw other people of colour, I saw the diversity. I've been to events where I've been the only person of colour. These things matter. I felt comfortable.

The symposia events succeeded in attracting both a broad spectrum of attendees and a diverse group of speakers and other stakeholders.

Similarly, event programmes were described as 'wellorganised', 'vibrant' and 'full of vitality' with a wide range of topics, meaning there was plenty to offer attendees from different backgrounds.

However, this did at time pose challenges when it came to the messaging around the symposia, as well as making sure that the events were appropriate for a range of experience levels and professional perspectives. Some participants said they would have liked more clarity around the aims of the events and within the programme (e.g. greater distinction and communication between 'general interest' sessions and more focused application advice sessions). There were also suggestions that some of the practical details regarding the application process could have been shared in a different format outside of the events.

Alongside prospective applicants, the symposia were an opportunity to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the Prize process. For example, members of the Fusion Prizewinning team *The Pattern* first found out about the Prize when they were asked to host a panel at one of the symposia events, which led to them becoming interested in applying.

Similarly, a number of Fusion Prize judges attended the symposia in an advisory capacity, which they found to be a valuable experience. From the judges' point a view, the symposia helped them to get a sense of who the Prize was attracting and to gain a deeper understanding of the Prize's aims and approach. Judges also felt that their attendance at the Prize helped it to feel more accessible to prospective applicants, who were able to approach the judges and ask for feedback on their ideas.

66

It made us more approachable through attendance – we weren't just a face behind the scenes.

# How did symposia attendance impact applications?

Shortlisting for the Fusion Prize took place in two stages. Firstly, Fusion Prize staff did an initial sift of applications into 'Red, Amber and Green' categories. These categories were then used as a guide for the judges when undertaking a 'longlisting' process, however the judges were not bound to these categories and in some instances moved applications from red or amber into the longlist.

This figure below looks at the relationship between symposia attendance and shortlisting status of applications.

Figure 4 Shortlist status and symposia attendance

Shortlist status	% teams with members who attended at least one of the symposia	
All applications	44%	
Red	40%	
Amber	40%	
Green	52%	
Judges longlist	52%	

Source: BOP Consulting 2020

- The strongest applicants (shortlisted 'green') were more likely to have attended symposia than weaker applicants (shortlisted 'amber' and 'red')
- Over half of the teams who were longlisted by the judges attended at least one of the symposia
- Almost one third (27%) of participants at the proposal advice sessions went on to be part of teams that were longlisted by the judges

This suggests that stronger applicants had a greater level of overall engagement with the Prize.

Qualitative evidence from a sample of applicants shows that in some cases engagement with events helped applicants to further develop their ideas ahead of applying to the Prize.

**66** It was useful to have a sounding board for our application, it helped us to formulate more succinct and concise answers to the application questions.



# How effective was the Challenge Prize process?

- The extension of the Prize process due to the pandemic did not negatively affect proposal development
- Participants coming to the Prize at a later stage said they would have liked more time between symposia events
- The application form and interview format were understood as fair and proportionate

Applicants were positive about the application process and felt it was well-managed, despite some frustration about the technical process for uploading the application forms.

**66** The questions on the form were relevant. I liked that they really delved into how we can make use of what we already have and what we already do.

For some who were introduced to the Prize in the Autumn, the time between symposia did not give them enough to develop their ideas and, in some cases, find collaborators. It was also noted that more publicity around the launch may have helped them find the Prize sooner.

Communication between the Fusion Prize team and finalists was highlighted as strong. Some non-finalists said they would have liked to have been kept more in the loop with regards to COVID-19 delays.

**66** I wasn't confused about what was going on. We weren't ever left asking when / who / what?

Despite an unplanned extension to the proposal development stage of the process, finalists generally found the extra time either neutral or beneficial when it came to refining their idea.

Finalists said the interview format gave them an fair opportunity to present their proposal, despite taking place virtually. For some, this format was more egalitarian than a traditional in-person pitch.

# To what extent did the Prize cultivate a community of practice?

- Focus group participants were open to continued engagement with the Fusion Prize / Culture Mile Learning
- Clear messaging and a clear sense of purpose would help to sustain networks created through the Prize
- Feedback regarding the use of the Slack channel was mixed

Focus group participants recognised the richness of knowledge and experience across Fusion Prize applicant teams and were receptive to the idea of a continued community of practice that exists beyond the lifetime of the Prize.

However, there was an acknowledgement that without the shared purpose that responding to the Fusion Prize challenge brief offered, extra stimulus would be needed to maintain a community of Prize engagees. This additional input would need to offer clarity of purpose.

66 I'd be interested in continuing to be part of that community. It would be great for them to send out a communication about how we can keep in touch. Some allowing people to connect with previous attendees and regain touch with people.

**66** [I'd be interested] if the notion of what a community of practice is sufficiently articulated to be useful. If it's just email addresses no, if it's open calls where, for example, we could work with another team then yes. It would need to have champions and active facilitation for this to work.

#### **Slack Channel**

During the prize period, applicants had access to a Slack Channel where they could discuss their proposals and put questions to the Prize administrators.

For some participants, an open-forum that was not time sensitive was a helpful tool to network and refine ideas. One participant reported regular use of the channel from November through to February.

Others, however, felt the platform was underutilised and would have liked the channel administrators to have a more active role in facilitating networks and community building.

- **66** Engagement fell down a little bit with the Slack channel. It lacked someone taking the role of a community manager.
- 66 I would have also liked an opportunity to connect to attendees before the event. The Slack channel could have been established beforehand, with a community manager or moderator.

# What kinds of support would participants like in future?

Participants highlighted a range of support topics that they felt could be beneficial.

Some of these were focused on their immediate experience, particularly in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

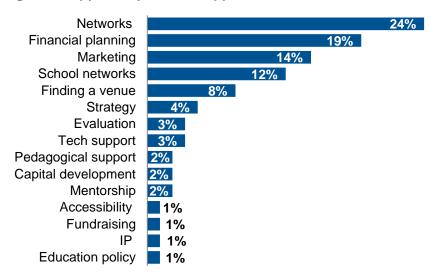
More widely, participants wanted opportunities for collaboration and concept development, including advice on how to find collaborations and how to connect with organisations.

Additionally, both participants and strategic stakeholders identified a possible need for ongoing support for applicants to develop their projects and to share their learnings around the Fusion skills and prize process,

It was a valuable experience and perhaps something that could be smaller scale and ongoing as a hub for connecting valuable projects, funds and skills.

Some participants also felt that they would have benefitted from more direct involvement from some of the Culture Mile partners and/or the opportunity to work with these organisations.

Figure 5 Support requested in application forms



Access to networks was the most frequently requested form of support within application forms, along with support for financial planning and marketing.

Focus group participants agreed that there could be a potential facilitative role for the Fusion Prize to play in making connections between applicant teams, partner organisations, youth groups and other stakeholders, 'connecting the dots'.

### What is the wider impact of the Prize?

The impact of the Prize was not confined to finalists and the winners. Unsuccessful applicants, non-applicants, and the judging panel all noted different ways they had felt benefits from being involved with the Prize:

- Non-applicants gained confidence, connections and developed their ideas through their engagement with Fusion Prize symposia
- Unsuccessful applicants used their applications as a starting point to seek support and investment elsewhere
- Fusion Prize judges appreciated the chance to connect with other judges and organisations through their involvement. Judges also saw the Prize as an opportunity to promote their work and further their/their organisation's mission
- 66One of the projects we put forward got funding directly afterwards. The Prize helped us to road test ideas and we wouldn't have thought of applying if it wasn't for the Fusion process.

Unsuccessful applicant

66 It was great to be connected to the judging panel. It was excellent for my organisation. It elevated what we do and it aligned with our vision, mission and values.

Judge



# Did the Prize offer value for money?

- Total expenditure across the different metrics is just over £126,000, including £9,000 seed funding and the final prize grant of £50,000. Culture Mile contributed an additional £25,000 of marketing spend from its own budget.
- Additionally, around 1,130 hours of staff time were required to deliver the prize, equivalent to six months full time work
- Around 600 individuals were in some way engaged with the Prize, with 66 applications made
- Offers of support were taken up by a third of applicants
- Fusion Prize content on the website was viewed 81,225 times, with 71,011 unique page views
- Fusion Prize content had higher levels of engagement than Culture Mile content, introducing new users to the organisation
- The Prize has received senior staff buy-in at a range of stakeholder organisations, providing additional advocacy opportunities

Key metrics relating to value for money can be found on Figure 6 overleaf. In general there was a sense amongst stakeholders and judges that the Fusion Prize achieved a lot on a very limited budget.

- **66** I think it was astonishing value for money.
- 66 It feels like it is value for money; the events sound expensive but actually they were relatively reasonable and [value] has really come around the advocacy.

Where questions were raised about increasing value, this was in relation to the communications spend of the Prize, although it was recognised that marketing is often highlighted in such conversations.

66 In retrospect are there things we poured lots of time and energy into that were incidental, and could we have spent that money on promoting the prize?

There was also a question around the extent to which the final investment is sufficient to allow real innovation, particularly for projects with a focus on innovation.

**66** Innovation is difficult for £50,000 if you're talking about technology. Anything that was an app was shut down because the money wouldn't go far enough.

# Did the Prize offer value for money?

#### Figure 6 Fusion Prize inputs and outputs

	Component	Resource (£ and hours)	Process	Reach #
	1) Marketing	£25,000 ('19 – '20 CM marketing budget) c. 30 hours of staff time £5,000 on Fusion Prize Film £6,000 freelance PR support from Foundation for Future London	<ul> <li>Delivered creative identity for Fusion Prize in keeping with Culture Mile brand</li> <li>Created all branded assets for social and digital channels, as well as printing for live events, including 47 artwork files and 12 Fusion Prize-branded pieces of social media content</li> <li>Devised and delivered campaign that a) built engagement with potential young person Fusion Prize applicants and b) drove awareness amongst education professionals</li> <li>Paid social and Google Display Network campaigns around Symposia</li> <li>Paid placements (e-shots, website advertising, print advertising) with The Educator magazine, Governing Matters, Voice, CYP Now, Educate and Education Today</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>71,011 unique page views for Fusion Prize content, with an average</li> </ul>
External	2) Support for applicants	£42,000 for launch and symposia costs £11,000 workshops, webinars, and advice for finalists £9,000 seed funding for applicants c. 1, 000 hours of staff time	<ul> <li>3x symposia events including over 20 different support sessions.</li> <li>1-1 Advice sessions provided to 22 applicant teams.</li> <li>Seed fund of £1,500 for finalists.</li> <li>8 optional workshops providing skills and business development support.</li> </ul>	c.550 attendees
	3) Application and pitching	£3,500 judging events and stipend for judges' charitable organisation		66 applicants, 6 finalists, 5 pitches
	4) Award	£50,000 grant £600 on guest speaker c. 40 across six different teams.	Hour-long award ceremony with approximately 140 attendees	<ul><li>1 team of two people</li><li>140 attendees of ceremony</li></ul>
	5) Alumni and/or cohort offer		<ul> <li>Judges informed each team of outcome in half hour phone call providing some feedback.</li> <li>Written feedback was collated and sent to each team.</li> <li>1 hour long Next Steps session offered to each seed-fund recipient.</li> <li>Longer-term Fusion Prize community to be fostered with offer of free office space, networking events, and workshops.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>5 finalist teams supported with advice and feedback.</li> <li>Connections fostered by the panel.</li> <li>Wider community includes a potential 600 individuals who engaged along the Prize process</li> </ul>
Internal	6) Positioning / alignment	c.25 hours for internal meetings to advocate for and explain the Prize		East Bank and CML partners engaged and committed to some involvement with the Prize. Barbican to work with winning solution
	7) Management www.bop.co.uk	c.40 hours from 3 senior members of staff involved in steering the Prize.		Museum of London, Culture Mile, Barbican.

### How did the Challenge Prize format work?

- The Fusion Prize was understood as a unique proposition by applicants, judges and stakeholders, especially within the cultural and creative sector
- The Prize helped to further the Fusion Skills agenda for partners
- However, the complexity and/or novelty of the model caused challenges when it came to communicating and publicising the Prize

Across the research, participants, stakeholders and judges recognised the Prize as unique opportunity, not a 'typical prize' with 'normal solutions. The objectives for the Prize were seen to play a role in advocating for the importance of creative skills to all sectors of work.

The challenge prize was something that was a bit different in the field of creativity. There was something about the process that made people invest in the process.

However, the complexity of the Prize model posed some challenges in terms of communication, including confusion around the aims of the Prize.

While the Prize incentive was enough to encourage a large number of applications, there was some confusion around expectations for the winners (i.e. the concept of the pilot was missed or misunderstood).

**66** This whole journey, it is quite unusual – it required a lot of explaining.

Participants also reported being unsure of the geographical scope of the Prize, given the London focus of the two major partners. Given these challenges, the Prize could have benefitted from more time and resource invested into communications planning and press engagement from the outset.

Finalists with a tech element (e.g. app development) in their proposal were understood as having a higher risk profile by the judging panel. This raised some questions about to what extent the Prize supported *technological* innovation, although it was acknowledged that there is naturally some tension when designing an application process that is open to a wide range of projects and applicants from a range of backgrounds.

### What were the strategic outcomes of the Prize?

- The partnership between FFL and CML helped both organisations to access new audiences and further their strategic approach to learning and skills development
- More clarity around expectations from the partnership at the outset would have helped both organisations in planning around the Prize
- Engagement with the Prize from both applicants and stakeholders has contributed a positive case and higher profile for partners' work around social mobility and creative learning, and has helped to advance strategy in this area

The Fusion Prize was delivered through a collaborative partnership between Culture Mile Learning and the Foundation for Future London.

The decision to enter into the partnership was taken after the project began, and has generally been perceived as a success for both teams, with positive outcomes for each organisation. The partnership provided opportunities to access new and different audiences, with key lessons learnt in relation to working with new communities, especially youth communities. There is clear desire to continue to work together and build the opportunities for further collaboration and recognition of the growing significance of the Prize aims in a time of economic crisis. However, both partners felt that the project could have benefitted from more clarity around what was expected from the partnership at its inception.

66 I think it seems very clear that the two cultural districts' main alignment is around skills development and wanting to help young people to thrive, and that being focussed around skills development and social mobility.

For the Foundation for Future London, the organisation is taking lessons from working with schools and educational institutions and sharing and expanding that learning across potential grantees. The Prize was also an opportunity to put the organisation's commitment to learning and skills development through culture as a central part of their narrative.

We've been able to engage through our directors, talking about Fusion Skills. We're also funding a range of projects looking at these skills and these impacts

Similarly, for Culture Mile, the Prize has helped the organisation to make the case for creative learning and entrepreneurship and to communicate this mission to their stakeholders.

### Findings and recommendations

- The Fusion Prize process, especially the symposia events, stimulated creativity and facilitated collaboration amongst those who engaged.
- The Prize succeeded in engaging people from a diverse range of professional and personal backgrounds.
- The Prize helped to advance the strategies and profiles of partners, especially in relation to the Fusion skills agenda.
- Unsuccessful applicants who participated in the research were open to continued engagement and support from the Fusion Prize team.
- The Fusion Prize format was understood as new and innovative, although it was difficult to communicate at times.
- Involvement from young people through the Youth Advisory Board was appreciated by applicants and other stakeholders. For future project, the Fusion Prize team should explore opportunities to involve young people throughout the process.

- Communications and PR were highlighted across the research as an area for additional investment. The Fusion Prize team should work with the Prize winners to maximise publicity surrounding the pilot project.
- Providing multiple platforms (e.g. the Slack channel) for applicants to engage with has strengths, but it needs to be carefully facilitated and moderated to ensure tools are useful, not burdens.
- Monitoring and evaluation processes (e.g. collection of demographic data) in place from the beginning of the project would have helped to get a fuller understanding of applicants and their journeys.
- Partnership working needs to have clearly defined expectations and roles at the start of the process, to avoid mixed messages and any one side feeling like they "bear the brunt" of activity.



**BOP Consulting** is an international consultancy specialising in culture and the creative economy.

BOP convenes the **World Cities Culture Forum** (WCCF), an international network of more than 35 cities. www.worldcitiescultureforum.com

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