Report from the NEF Collaborative Day

April 9th, 2024, Brussels

'Strategic Communication and Narrative Changes in Collaborative Funds'

Overview

The most common takeaway from the day among participants was about the value of connecting the projects and the fields and issues they work on. Participants felt that the potential was felt particularly strong around strategic communications and narrative change.

• **Project Connections:** With numerous newcomers, our initial focus was on establishing connections not only with the work they are engaged in but also with the individuals driving those initiatives. Participants actively participated in one-on-one and small group discussions, complemented by a walking gallery showcasing project posters.

This session surfaced reflections on how we take on new information and build relationships: through stories, through in-person connection, and through curiosity. This as much applies to how the projects build on these connections with one another as to how we communicate the impact of our work.

• **Strategic Communication and Narrative Changes Session:** The session aimed to equip NEF partners with a shared language and references, as a basis for learning together about strat comms and narrative change. To help us with that, Tom Brookes, CEO of Global Strategic Communications Council, and Mandy Van Deven, founder of Both/And Solutions, shared their philanthropic insights on supporting narrative changes and strategic communications. Their contributions were highly valuable, offering tangible examples and insights into enhancing communications and crafting alternative narratives, particularly in the realm of climate change.

• **Key Discussion Points:** Following the presentations, a robust discussion ensued, addressing challenges intrinsic to this field. Key takeaways included:

- Leveraging interconnections across issues to foster alliances and mutual understanding among communities.
- Adopting an ecosystem thinking approach, recognizing that narratives and interventions are part of broader systems. So, our interventions should be at the systems-level, too, not thinking about one-off, golden-bullet communications interventions, but waves and varieties of voices and approaches.
- Emphasizing the importance of shared visioning and embracing complexity, to provide shared visions as guiding stars by which to assess the progress of strategic communications and narrative change work.
- Starting with where the audience is at, prioritizing social salience over scientific rigor and language in communications.

Participants engaged in group discussions to explore the applicability of these insights in their contexts, primarily by sharing practical approaches to advancing strategic communications

with their grantee partners. There was a consensus on translating emerging ideas as potential 'seeds' into collective action through NEF.

• **Narrative Deconstruction and Reconstruction:** Given the evolving political landscape and threats to democracy and minorities across Europe, there is a pressing need to articulate a compelling narrative about democracy. Participants utilised a methodology led by Julia Kliober at Superrr Lab, deconstructing prevailing narratives and crafting new ones centered around messages such as:

- Enhancing democracy for people and the planet
- Leveraging technology for societal benefit and healthy democracies
- Achieving a 30% reduction in carbon emissions through the new green deal [i.e. making it tangible and relatable]
- Emphasizing shared humanity, future, and hope

• **Collaborative Reflection:** Participants reflected on the significance of collaborative efforts. As it was said: we now get why the projects should collaborate more strongly, but the question now is how to operationalise those collective responses? We have taken note of the suggestions and plan to allocate time to delve deeper into them with various project teams, incorporating this into our upcoming workplan.

Overall, our collaborative day was well-received, and we will work on the feedback received.