

PLATFORM LONDON

Who: Adam Ma'anit, Anna Galkina, Emma Hughes, Farzana Khan, James Marriott, Jane Trowell, Mark Roberts, Mika Minio-Paluello, Sarah Legge, Sarah Shoraka, Tanya Hawkes

Location: London

Operative since: 1983

Practice organised non-hierarchically through consensus. Legal status: Charity, and Company Limited by Guarantee

<http://platformlondon.org/>

Platform combine art, activism, education and research in one organisation. This approach enables them to create unique projects driven by the need for social and ecological justice. Platform's current campaigns focus on the social, economic and environmental impacts of the global oil industry. Their pioneering education courses, exhibitions, art events and book projects promote radical new ideas that inspire change. Their team includes campaigners, artists and researchers who act together and with networks to achieve long-term, systemic goals. Everyone in Platform is committed to core values of justice, solidarity, creativity and democracy.

For 15 years Platform has used a Social Justice Waging System for salaried staff. Under this pioneering policy, staff get paid the same core salary rate which is adjusted according to a range of factors, including how many dependents or how much inherited wealth they have, should these situations arise. This policy is one part of a continual process of addressing issues of equality, power and privilege within the organisation and wider society.

What is the background of the socially just waging system and through which stages did you work it out? Did you for instance try out different versions of it to arrive at something you could all agree on?

Platform started in 1983. For the first 6 or 7 years of Platform there was no expectation of being paid. We were an activist group, and everyone was either doing other work to pay for living, or were on the dole and had housing benefit etc. Even then there were differentials in how much people had to do paid work in order to cover living costs. Some people had very cheap rent, some people were squatting, some had help from their parents etc. Once we started raising grants that could pay a fee the question came up - is a flat fee for each collaborator fair given that people had different circumstances? How do we decide the criteria for a sliding scale? We discussed it a lot but the money was so periodic that it was a bit academic. In the late 90s we were getting better at fundraising and started being able to pay ourselves a wage. This was the time we really needed to develop something to create a just way to account for different circumstances. So we set about it and our first version was called the 'Weighted Waging System'. There were five of us in Platform all working part-time, working by consensus. After a lot of work we invented a detailed matrix which looked at our expenditures on different essentials and also disposable income. It was quite complicated and lengthy, but everyone bought into it and I don't remember any real conflict although we did have some lively argument about what different one's of us thought of as 'essential'.

Sometime in the 2000s we reviewed it completely: as new people came in it was important to check it worked for them. We changed the framing of it away from expenditure on essentials and how much disposable income was reasonable (which requires a lot of trust between people which is a big thing for when new people join a group). We decided it was more just to have criteria that looked at privilege but also responsibilities for dependents. We devised questions that could lead to 'increments' (increases in your core rate) or what we called 'dincrements' which would decrease your core rate to adjust for material advantage. We call this the 'Socially Just Waging System'. Things that lead to increments include having dependents, but also longevity of service. You'd get decrements for having certain financial advantages such as being left some money by a relative etc. It's not foolproof but we have been running it for nearly 15 years now and new people have come and gone, and it has not caused any conflict which is amazing. It does rely on honesty and goodwill, and trust. We do revise it periodically. Our core rate is £31,000 full-time equivalent.

Where do your resources come from in the first place? Often there is a sense that for an activist practice it is difficult to find monetary support - how do you work this out? What strategies do you have when one source of income is drastically reduced? What mechanisms do you have in place to make sure Platform can continue even through moments of crisis?

In the late 90s we decided after a lot of discussion to try to achieve charitable status. This was a

big decision because ideologically we were well aware of the political constraints on our actions of having that status. At the same time, we wanted to build Platform into something that could last and have permanent presence. We wanted a space to work out of, and we wanted to aim at paying people on a regular basis. Having charitable status meant we could apply to a lot more funders. We also felt it was problematic on a level of social justice to do ongoing work that was so precariously funded. That automatically puts more pressure on people looking after dependents than those who don't have these responsibilities, for example. If we wanted to broaden the kinds of people who could work in Platform and enable them to commit over a longish time, then we decided that being able to pay a wage - even part-time - was a step forward. Having said that, part-time working excludes other people who need the material security of a full-time job, or don't have the capacity to put together two part-time jobs to make up the hours and salary.

So, we became a charity at the third attempt, and we began to fundraise mainly from environmental and human rights foundation and trusts. In the 2000s we got some training to get better at fundraising and to share fundraising skills. Now we are funded from these sectors, but also, since 1991 we have been funded on and off with project grants and sometimes core funding from the Arts Council England. The interdisciplinary mix is essential for our survival. If one sector gets difficult, we go to another.

In the past few years we have been able to build up reserves slowly but surely. This is something the Charity Commission requires you to do because of the costs of winding up a charity! But for us it also makes a lot of sense. A hand to mouth existence with money can take its toll on people's nerves and insecurities, and therefore on the whole organisation in different ways. Over the past 30 years we have had many moments of being very near the edge, and it would be true to say that time to work through such moments is essential. However, pressure of time, and financial insecurities can feel very harassing in unequal ways depending on people's individual histories. These tensions can split the group. Because we work from consensus, time is essential to listen to each other which can also avoid damaging conflicts. Time is needed to come to a calm, collective and clever plan to get out of a problem. Another way to resolve financial straits has been to collectively agree on cuts and savings, bearing in mind our commitment to socially justice considerations, as well as responsibilities to communities and funders. We are also grateful to our Board of Trustees who have a difficult task of overseeing anarchist-influenced artistic-activist endeavour. It's essential to put time into a sustaining a good relationship with them and it is especially important when money is tight. Finally, it is amazing to have a colleague whose role is solely to look after the finances. The first time we were able to pay someone to do this was in 2006. For the first 23 years (!), one of us did it as best we could alongside our project/campaigning work. That was increasingly hard work once the sums of money we raised and managed increased. At the moment there are 10 salaried people in Platform all part-time, most between 3 and 4 days a week. Last year's turnover was around £400,000.

The attitude to funders is also crucial. Funders exist to support work, and we try to frame relationships with funders to work together to get the work done, rather than an attitude of 'they are the people with the money'. At the same time we want to be funded by sources whose values are close to ours. This can also help with long-term stability because we try to build relationships to last (even if they don't). Funders and funding officers can be great allies even if there's no grant coming from them at any given moment.