

Lankelly Chase

REVISED FAQs

What are you planning to do?

We have started a five year process of dismantling our organisation and working out alternative futures for our assets, including our capital, learning and the protective factors that come with being an endowed charitable foundation.

We will work in deep collaboration with those whose struggle and vision have helped us see that alternative futures to capitalist philanthropy are both essential and possible. With them, we will develop strategies for transitioning over the next five years from our current institutional funding model to alternatives that align accountability, ownership and investment much more closely with the communities and change we have aimed to serve. By the end of the five years, we expect ownership of our assets to have been wholly redistributed, as part of a wider process of change.

What led to this decision?

For years, we have tried to bridge the divide between philanthropy and community as much as we could but were increasingly concerned that problematic power structures remained intact. Through many years of work by our staff, partners and more recently through a renewed board, we reflected on the various ways in which philanthropy is deeply contradictory:

1. **Who controls the money vs who keeps the vision and does the work.** Our model of holding capital separately within funding bodies that set their own criteria, strategies and expectations is a legacy of nineteenth-century institution building that is proving increasingly toxic in our current context. We have limited belief that the innovations of institutional philanthropy – including many models of participatory grant making and place-based funding– can ever overcome the inherent problems of institutional philanthropy as a function of colonial capitalism.
2. **Where the money is invested vs what the proceeds are spent on.** After working hard to align our investment strategy with our mission, we now see real risk in over-claiming how much foundations can do to ‘cleanse’ the money we derive from capitalist extraction. We have pursued ‘sustainable’ investment strategies and nonetheless remain active players in an extractive approach to investment, the impact of which on people, land and nature worldwide is impossible to account for. We would not award grants on the same basis and would be justly condemned for doing so.
3. **The concept of charity vs the pursuit of justice.** Many of the harms that charities exist to address are created by social, political and economic factors that sit outside the remit of charitable activity. Worse still, charities are often softening the blows of the very colonial capitalism that they depend upon for their income. If charities are to overcome these significant constraints, they need to form part of diverse alliances of actors based on solidarity, activism and accountable allyship. Philanthropic institutions make such alliances much harder by encouraging competition, separation and vertical accountability.

We reached the conclusion that there is no way out of these contradictions inside the current model of philanthropy. We also realised that although we had been funding others to make change, we had not allowed the learning from that work to change us. Given our global context of interlocking social, climate and economic crises, we came to view that it is intolerable and self-defeating to continue in such a state of contradiction and that we need to act with boldness and courage. Our board is now made up of people who are used to living with a lot of uncertainty, so this changed how we viewed risk of acting outside of established norms.

What's the goal?

The creation of healthy resourcing systems for social justice work. By 'healthy' we mean:

1. Promoting mutuality and collectivism.
2. Enabling resources to flow with ease to communities doing social justice work.
3. Investing capital in ways that are aligned with the visions and values of communities.
4. Allowing a diversity of resourcing approaches to flourish that reflect the necessary diversity of life-affirming work.
5. Supporting the deep embodiment of alternative ways of living, knowing and being in the world.

What principles are underpinning the transition?

- Mutuality, sustainability and collectivism.
- Endowments held in and for the collective
- Equitable flow of resources
- Strategies by and for affected communities
- Embodiment of alternative ways of living, knowing and being in the world

Why five years?

We have set 5 years to allow enough time to engage with communities to ensure the redistribution of our assets is done with care and responsibility and allows space for alternative ways of living, knowing and being in the world to shape the transition. Any longer would not reflect the urgency of the situation, and would allow this decision to be treated as an idea for the future rather than as a basis for immediate action.

How can I apply for these funds?

We will not be taking any immediate decisions about how we will redistribute as we first intend to engage in deep dialogue with a number of communities to ensure that this creates the most enduring legacy. We'll be saying more about how we want to hold those conversations in early 2024. In the meantime, we're reducing our grant spend significantly, so there won't be funding available for new requests.

How was the decision made?

The decision was made by the board of trustees following years of learning from the work, both within and outside Lankelly Chase, and after struggling to align our organisational form, position and strategy with our mission.

What's the process for co-creating this with communities?

We want this process to support different ways of being with each other - healthier and more equitable ways of relating to each other. The journey will have as much of an impact as the

money coming months so that next year (2024) we can co-create values and principles to ensure that will guide what is being built beyond Lankelly Chase. Equally we'll be joining spaces opened by others. Please do also get in touch directly if you have thoughts and advice on the processes of engagement, resourcing, inclusion and reimagination that will best support this work.

What do you mean by 'community' and how will you decide who to work with in this process?

Our focus has been on communities subject to systems of oppression, both rooted in physical place and beyond, who bring life-affirming alternatives to the model/world/system that's been acting in an oppressive way. As this work progresses, it has to be about more than the people Lankelly Chase already knows, as we are a limited filter. Rather than focusing on who has the most need for resourcing, we want to connect with communities with shared intention around movement.

How can we support you?

By being a friend and being with us to stretch, think, support and challenge us and by bringing your community along. Together we know more.

How will you resource organisers, movements and organisations to contribute to your thinking and strategy?

It is the vision and work of many organisers, movements and organisations that has helped to move Lankelly Chase. So we want to honour this and continue to work with as much mutuality as possible. This means valuing people's contributions and ensuring this process is not extractive, which will include resourcing people's time. We will need to make some choices about who is resourced to play a meaningful part in this and want to do this carefully and responsibly. Our intention is that over time, the power over this process shifts beyond Lankelly and to communities who will be holding our assets instead of us.

How will you 'transfer capital to communities'?

We don't know yet - but we know that we want to co-create the principles for how to do this with communities. By definition we don't know what this will be as we're trying to give way to something else and we need to let wisdom in. We are trying to resist the mentality that wants to move to structural solutions immediately. This also includes shifting the organisation out of a grant making mindset and towards reimaging different practices. We want to be wide open to them as we will need all the wisdom for this transition.

What led to the decision to transfer £8m to Baobab?

Before we reached the conclusion about dismantling LCF, we decided to transfer 5% of our endowment to Baobab, who we believe are an extraordinary group of people trying to disrupt the status quo in service of reimaging resourcing systems for social justice work.. They are trying to set this up in a way which is networked and accountable – and for this they need space to develop their work, try things out and act differently. We hope that our contribution and that of other foundations will enable them to do that.

What are your thoughts on making this sustainable and investing the capital for the future?

We are looking into life-affirming investment models and are open to learning from others.

We know this will include looking at and shifting our relationship to money and power. Right now, we are using capital in a way that is about hoarding it then using it to fund work. That means the capital is not sufficiently available to communities and could be invested in ways that are more in service of what communities want. So this is an opportunity to shift from ego, silo and competition towards collective infrastructure.

Much as we all want a secure and sustainable source of funding for social justice work, there is nothing secure or sustainable about investments that are destroying lives now and endangering our future on this planet. We have to be honest that philanthropy has been a convenient buffer between how the money is earned and what it is spend on. Our hope is that greater honesty about this will allow for more generative and powerful conversations about alternative ways of relating to wealth and sustainable resourcing.

Who and what are you hoping to influence?

First and foremost we are trying to do this with as much embodiment and integrity to life affirming values as we can. This will have the biggest influence on those in philanthropy who know things aren't working but don't have the support or solidarity to do something about it. We know many of them are taking courage from us and feel this liberates a different kind of honesty.

We're not saying redistributing is THE answer and everyone should do the same, but we hope it will enable others to examine their own relationships with the current context and ask themselves new questions. There's also a big job to support other CEOs in foundations to shift their boards, so our leadership team and trustees will do some peer influencing around that.

What if you can't change the whole system?

We obviously don't believe that dismantling Lankelly Chase will impact the overall capitalist model, although we do believe in the possibility of ripple effects. Right now as a foundation in philanthropy we are creating precariousness and holding wealth – and we don't have to subscribe to this. The changes that we seek will start with each of us taking responsibility for our current way of being. We can't not act because just we alone won't make a difference. Our hope is that one organisation breaking the connections with the dominant narrative can liberate others to feel they are capable of the same.

Where does your money come from?

The money come from land purchases and property development in the middle of the twentieth century. See this [history of Lankelly Chase](#) and our [investment approach](#).

How can you take care of your wider community as you go through this change?

As we transition, we will continue to support many of our current grantees whose work, insights and friendship have allowed us to understand the need to disrupt and reimagine what resourcing should look like. To be clear, we will be honouring all of our grant agreements and contracts.

We know that the loss is more than financial. Some grantees have experienced a degree of security, legitimacy and solidarity from their relationship with a prominent grant maker. Part of the work over our remaining time will therefore be to understand how some of these social, cultural and positional assets can be transferred with the capital.

Why didn't you consult before making this decision?

We shifted the profile of our board to bring in movement and community leaders to assess whether our organisation could be changed to make it fit to deliver on our mission. Their view was that the contradictions were insurmountable and, in the context of global crises, they had a moral and legal duty to act. If we had consulted, we would have been involving people in a decision that was already clear to the people who hold responsibility for that decision. While the closure of Lankelly Chase was a decision for our trustees to make, they are clear that the process of redistribution is one that needs to happen through deep collaboration.

Is this a spend out?

No. This is a redistribution. Spend out or spend down means spending your capital faster than you replenish it, and so limiting the lifespan of the organisation. Spend out has many merits, but it is fundamentally an accelerated version of the same institutional model. We are breaking up our institution so that capital can be owned and controlled by others, who can make their own decisions about how to spend it.

What if communities don't want to hold the money or become funders?

Holding money isn't for everyone, and it is certainly not everyone's wish to become a funder. We want to work with communities to understand how best the money can be held to enable the work rather than become a burden. The 'funder' role is only one possible model for how the money can be used and distributed in the future.

LC has been a strong ally for many community groups. Who will be their ally when you're gone?

One of the assets of philanthropy is the positional power that it holds, and that can lend legitimacy and a degree of safety to the work of those with much less power. Of course, this is a double-edged sword because that very power relationship upholds an injustice that needs to be dismantled. Nonetheless, there is a real risk that community groups may feel more exposed without Lankelly Chase backing them, even if they go on to hold our former assets in the future. This needs to be part of how we co-design the next phase of the work with those communities so that the protective factors that Lankelly Chase enjoyed can transfer as much as possible with the capital.

How do you avoid power shifting to a new set of gatekeepers and intermediaries?

If we shift the capital but the same way of living, knowing and being together continues then this work will have failed. We know that there are many partners and communities who are deeply committed to resourcing in more equitable and democratised ways, building on decades of decolonising practice. They have no appetite to become gatekeepers, but they will need lots of support and time to avoid the risk of falling into that role. This is why we have set a five year horizon.

Is LC abdicating responsibility?

Our intention is the opposite. We want to be responsible for addressing head-on the deep and harmful contradictions that run through our work and position and we want to be responsible for helping to instigate much healthier ways of resourcing social justice work in the future.

Who will fill the gaps in funding progressive work when LC is gone?

Our capital will transfer to others before we close, so will still be available for progressive work. This is why we are not spending down.

Also, the gaps in funding are already there. Most foundations meet a small fraction of the demand that reaches their door, and this is undoubtedly itself only a small fraction of the real need for resources that is out there. Foundations have maintained a 'scarcity' model in which we have been necessary gatekeepers between wealth and communities, and which has skewed resourcing to a very limited pool of civil society actors. We need to reimagine what is possible for the stewardship of that wealth so that it is held with more equity and supports the abundance that comes from interconnection.

Is this a natural progression for Lankelly Chase or a sudden change?

Both. LC has been building towards this for some time through its action inquiries, place work and investment approaches. However, there has been a lot of 'stuckness' in our work in recent years, owing largely to the contradictions outlined above, and this decision is definitely a way of disrupting our model in order to take the necessary next steps.