Realized through

value collective

Resources and Strategies for Supporting Value-Driven Work

A design guide based on findings from the participatory workshop "Thinking Outside the Market"

What is Value Collective?

Value Collective (VC) is an initiative to support work that is **valuable, but not profitable,** using alter-economic thinking and practice.

We believe that the weight of financial pressures in people's lives prevents them from effectively addressing the needs and desires of their communities, as well as their own. Indeed, an economy based on financial growth marginalizes all other forms of value-creation: cultural, social, aesthetic, ecological, personal, spiritual, etc. Many activities that promote joy, wellbeing, and purpose don't generate a penny and yet are essential to our collective existence on Earth. As 'income chasing' is necessary to survive in an increasingly financialized society, any activity contributing to non-marketable spheres of life is placed at a disadvantage.

Recognizing that many activities essential to our collective wellbeing can't or shouldn't be marketable, Value Collective develops strategies to reduce financial pressures for individuals and organisations. This is currently done through VC's Residency program and ongoing action-research.

Value Collective is based la **Cité-des-Hospitalières, in Tiohtià:ke / Montreal.**

Contents

The following pages present an analysis of findings drawn from a participatory workshop hosted by VCDC at la Cité-des-Hospitalières on June 15, 2022.

In this workshop, 20 people from different backgrounds and practices were invited to reflect on the types of work that bring them purpose but no money, and the resources they need to make them happen.

Initially drafted as an internal document, this guide was created by the **Value Collective Development Crew (VCDC)** to aid in the development of VC's **Residency program**. In making it public, our hope is that it may also contribute to emerging discourse around **alter-economies** and the importance of supporting **value-driven work**.

A presentation contextualized the event and was followed by two activities, "Future Diary" and "Toolkit Building", inviting participants to imagine a year free from financial pressures to undertake the work of their choice. Participants noted on post-its the resources they would need for that year to be a success, which were then mapped and clustered around the 10 themes that compose this document.

Glossary

VCDC
"Value Collective Development Crew". Team tasked with developing and fostering the collective's programs, research and operations

VC Residency program
This program, facilitated by VCDC, aims to support *value-driven workers* (see below) through the access to a collection of common resources.

Alter-economies
Systems of exchange, coordination and actions leading to the wellbeing and fulfilment of its participants that diverge from conventional economic models. These include gift economies, barter, complementary currencies, interpersonal relationships and much more.

Value-driven work
Differentiated from work undertaken primarily to earn an income, value-driven work is intrinsically-motivated, contributes to individual or collective wellbeing, and is difficult to monetize.

Toolkit building activity

Prompt : Imagine you have one year to do the work of your choice, free from financial pressures. What will you need or want for this year to be a success?

Goal of the activity : Building the basis for the Residency Program from the perspective of prospective residents.

Objective of the analysis : Translating the needs expressed in the activity into a list of potential resources and ideas on how to implement them.

Digitized transcript »

Resources are categorized as either *Immaterial* or *Material.*

Each theme includes *Implementation strategies :* potential methods through which VC could provide a particular resource.

Immaterial resources

Community

People who understand and complement

Frameworks for collaboration, exchange and help

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Community

The need for community is the first dominant theme that emerged from this activity. While the term itself can be broad and unspecific, we subdivided this area into subsections that can help us be more targeted on how we address this need. In a nutshell, this section addresses the barriers that comes with being or feeling alone, without a platform, and considers how this prevents people from engaging in value-driven activities.

People who understand and complement

Community can be understood as the fundamental need to be among peers who share common values and worldviews. These peers bring a variety of backgrounds, expertise, experience and knowledge in order to help one another arrive at a place they cannot access alone.

Implementation strategies

- Host a day for all new residents to meet one another and get a sense of the cohort they are integrating ;
- Hold regular open discussions among residents ;
- Host "Lunch & Learn" events.

See post-its "A network of like-minded people", "Like-minded people", "Like minded-people to support", "Like-minded people to discuss my ideas with", "Surrounded by creative solution-minded people", "Listeners", "Writing Circle", "Social Networks"

Frameworks for collaboration, exchange and help

Here, we identify the need for opportunities to get ideas and ambitions out into a sphere where others can reinforce and enrich them.

These mutual exchanges can happen organically by virtue of physical proximity, but should also be facilitated intentionally.

Implementation strategies

- Regular open discussions among residents, facilitated by VCDC ;
- Regular check-ins with VCDC ;
- Communal dinners ;
- Collective work for time credits.

See post-its, "Support from community", "Like-minded people to support", "A community of creatives that can collaborate with each other", "Team of passionate intervention workers", "Readers", "People to give feedback", "A partner", "Collaborators", "Community / team / collaborators", "Teams"

Celebration of one another

With community comes mutual excitement for one another, an overarching energy that people feed off from in order to keep moving forward, even when things become challenging. Ideally, a healthy community provides motivation and other psychological factors that contribute to a sense of purpose and self-worth. This is reminiscent of intensive educational programs or summer camps where a sense collective purpose forms tight bonds between participants, providing a pulse that maintains energy levels high. Celebrations, rituals or a moments of release (like a closing ceremony, awards or a party) can reinforce this feeling of belonging.

Implementation strategies
- Opening day: residents are collectively welcomed to the program ;
- Emphasize the idea of a cohort ;
- Individual arrival and departure ceremonies ;
- Communal dinners, parties.

See post-its "Hype people", "Other motivated people", "People who believe in me"

Mentorship and guidance

While peers might be available to support periodically, even collaborate, mentors hold a specific role. They ideally provide a wealth of knowledge and prior experience as well as empathy and care, in order to help the mentee find their bearings where bearings need to be found. This is a more personal and sustained relationship. Within VC residents, mentors might be found in fellow residents or could be brought in externally.

Implementation strategies
- VCDC headhunts mentors on case-by-case basis ;
- Web page lists call-outs for mentors ;
- Mentorship facilitated by a complementary currency ;
- Residents agree to be present for mentorship call-outs when integrating VC.

See post-its "Help (mentors)", "Mentorship", "Mentors in the trades that don't discriminate", "Ideas from people with prior experience to jumpstart my own ideas"

Professional resources

Similarly to the previous point, professional resources are punctual forms of assistance mostly relating to technical needs. The point here isn't necessarily overarching guidance, but to help on a given subject that the resident has themself identified.

Implementation strategies
- A web page listing expert call-outs ;
- VCDC headhunts experts on case-by-case basis ;
- Professional services are facilitated by complementary currency.

See post-its "Marketing/comms experts", "Bike maintenance (bike mechanics)", "Outreach coordinator", "Folks who are good at promoting things", "People who can teach using climbing gear"

Empowerment

Psychological factors are another consideration that should influence how the Residency program is shaped. VCDC has been talking about psychological factors since early on, through the lens of self-determination theory. In the unconventional space in which we are working, in the types of worldviews we are legitimizing, there needs to be an imbued sense of purpose and belief in one's self. Providing the infrastructure for people to believe in the value of their work should, and will, be at the forefront of what we do.

Feelings of empowerment

A feeling isn't a 'resource' per se, but VCDC's job is in part to aim for this sentiment to grow within residents. As we are attempting to legitimize types of work that are marginalized in a market economy, our residents are likely to come to us with a sense of disenfranchisement (on varying levels). Through the program, they will need to be given the resources and the space to remain motivated, feel like their work is feasible, worthwhile and credible. In turn, the whole VC community needs to spark determination, courage, faith and self-confidence.

Implementation strategies
- See below

See post-its "Motivation", "Feeling like it's worthwhile", "Credibility", "Determination", "Courage", "Faith in the idea", "Self-confidence"

Empowering factors

The charrette's participants have already given us some leads on how to enable these feelings. As a starting point, we can see that there is interest in having a public platform, connections to people in positions of power and public recognition. Some may need more structure (while some may need less) as well as other people with whom to discuss.

Implementation strategies
- Offer to facilitate residencies with deadlines ;
- Having internal events to celebrate residents ;
- Hosting public events showcasing people's work ;
- Connecting Residents to municipal decision-makers ;
- Allowing/encouraging residents to design their own residencies.

See post-its "Exchange", "Deadlines", "Recognition", "Public exposition", "Political support", "Seeing tangible outcomes"

Time

Time has been part of VCDC's vision since Value Collective's very first iteration, envisioning it as a place that gives people the time and freedom to do what they want.

Time happens to be the most systemic of resources we aspire to give people, as it is contingent on broader cultural rhythms. If time is finite, providing more of it invariably means addressing all other aspects of people's lives. If someone has a demanding 9-to-5 job, how does adding VC to their schedule free up more time? How can we, as a small entity, carve out a different rhythm within a larger time-system we are trying to disrupt?

We have so far envisioned the provision of time through the subtraction of other factors, primarily the reduction of financial pressures. This is a valid strategy, but we shouldn't limit ourselves to it.

If we want VC to be a window into a radically different approach to time, work and life rhythms, it is worth thinking about time through another lens. Rather than seeing it as scarce (and in turn perpetuating that approach with VC residents), let's instead consider the abundance of time. Time might be finite within a 24-hour cycle, but is infinite on a timescale that exceeds the boundaries of months, years, and our own lives. After all, it is immaterial, and deeply subjective.

How we feel about time reflects how we feel about our own rhythms – and there is an infinity of rhythms for the same unit of time. A 2-month vacation is very different from one free day per week, even if it amounts to the same number of days in a year. So, letting go of time as a contained vessel can enable different, freer rhythms.

Implementation strategies
- Replacing time constraints for residencies (e.g. 1-year, 2-year residencies) to other parameters (e.g. residents leave when they cannot get what they need from VC) ;
- Consult ORN on their approach, and review literature on this pedagogical approach ;
- Integrate reflection on time and freedom in VC's mission and external communications, as well as in the residency structure, so that this approach is intentional and understood by residents ;
- Keep designing program to reduce external pressures.

See post-its "Time", "More time", "Time to write", "Free time (one free day per week)", "More time to read, learn, discover, less counterproductive work to make end's meet", "Less familial responsibility", "Weekday time free from obligations"

How does this philosophical musing apply concretely to the residency program? If giving people more time is really just a question of giving people a different rhythm, we can strive to put that into practice. If time outside of VC is constricted because of various pressures, let's imagine how VC can be a place with fewer pressures and exigencies. We may very well take the approach adopted by the art-research studio the Office of Rules and Norms as a model : providing ample guidance and resources, but letting people go at their own rhythm, even if it isn't linear or streamlined. Hard deliverables or deadlines should only be present if wanted by the resident, and shouldn't be arbitrary. This essentially amounts to building a culture of slowness (or at least the possibility of slowness, if slowness is what is needed by any given resident).

Space

Access to space covers the ground of many different needs, since it tangentially provides access to other people, facilitates certain types of work that cannot happen in one's home, and provides a certain legitimacy. Through the activity, we were able to isolate two different subcategories: "Spatial qualities" and "Type of space".

Spatial qualities

The spatial qualities that were most mentioned alluded to a sense of wellbeing and acceptance within the space, as well a place of collaboration and open-endedness. To be concise, participants described needing a place where one feels safe and free. Both these qualities touch on the potential for creativity, as creativity happens best in spaces of inhibition and the release from extrinsic pressures.

Implementation strategies

- Implementing a culture of acceptance ;
- Adopting protocols of inclusion ;
- Providing comfortable furnishing.

See post-its "Welcoming space", "Collaborative space", "Space accepted by community (shelter welcomed by neighbors)", "Access to land and freedom to do what I want in it", "Studio space with running water", "Sunlight"

Types of space

This category is the technical equivalent of the former. Drawing from the results of the activity, we can assume that residents will need spaces that can accommodate activities that cannot happen in their home (for ex., larger spaces, storage, technical qualities).

Implementation strategies

- Working case-by-case with residents ;
- Finding creative arrangements at CdH ;
- Keeping a record of people's need.

See post-its for "Storage", "Venue to perform in", "A workshop", "Workspace", "Bike and trailer storage / parking", "A big kitchen, equipped, not cluttered", "Studio space, soundproofed, to record and collaborate", "Studio space"

Materials

This category is most easily transposable into a collection of shared resources. Thanks to the results of the activity, we now have a starting point from which to build this collection. The challenge lies in how to build these resources over time : how to determine which needs are one-offs (like renting a truck), and which are worth the investment as an asset (owning and storing a truck, and developing a reservation system). This is worth thorough discussions and decision-making processes to determine the way in which each resource is provided. One possibility is to create an evolving reference document outlining resources available to residents, that can progressively be expanded and amended by anyone within VC. Furthermore, in the acquisition of these shared resources, we should continue to emphasize alter-economic exchange and repurposing even when we may have the money to buy new.

Tools

As illustrated by the activity, we can anticipate a proportion of residents to be artists, designers, builders or other creative types who will need easy access to certain tools to carry out their desired work. This type of resource can also be desirable for non-artists.

Implementation strategies
- Partner with a tool library ;
- Create a fund for tool rentals.

See post-its "Power tools", "Solar circuit", "Tools", "More shared (accessible) tools", "Wireless PA speakers", "5000 lumen projector", "Software", "Printing costs"

Supplies

Supplies are essential not only for residents but for all people working at VC. Because supplies are cheaper, less resource-demanding and take up less space than tools, the stakes in this category are smaller than the previous. This resource will therefore require less deliberation and fewer decision-making protocols.

Implementation strategies
- Create a fund for supplies ;
- Find supplies in alter-economic ways (e.g. the Concordia Center for Creative Reuse)

See post-its "Spare tubes", "Material for workshops", "Art supplies", "Ink, paper, paint, etc.", "Repurposed materials"

Food

Food has been considered an essential resource by VCDC from the very start. The fact that food was mentioned by several participants in this activity can be taken as confirmation that this resource is needed and should be addressed in the implementation of the Shared Resources program. However, the workshop participants were clear about the need for access to local, organic, good quality food.

Implementation strategies
- Partner with local grocers or farms in the Montreal area ;
- Pay-what-you-can food days.

See post-its "Bulk sources", "Minimal packaging sources", "Local food supplier / sources", "Food", "Fresh food", "Nutrient-dense, organically-grown food", "Food for sheltered", "Organic food"

Digital infrastructure

It is likely that the need for digital infrastructure exceeds that mentioned in the activity. It is likely that creative software (for ex., Photoshop), or streaming software (for ex., Zoom Pro), will be needed at a given moment. It is unlikely that this type of resource can be acquired alter-economically but group subscriptions can allow for access by many users at VC.

Implementation strategies
- Purchase group subscriptions.

See post-its "Email", "File management", "Documentation"

Money

There will be instances where residents will simply need hard cash to carry out their work. While we should encourage residents and help them meet their needs directly and / or in non-financial ways, this might not always be possible.

Ideas for implementation
- Working out alternatives with residents
- Monthly hard cash fund

See post-its "Donations for homeless people", "Salary + budget"

Transport

Transport can divided into two sub-categories : mobility (moving oneself around the city) and transportation (moving objects around). This is another technical need, necessary to better connect residents geographically to VC and to other spaces, as well as ensuring their ability to move materials across the city as needed.

Mobility

Mobility can be facilitated in different ways, whether through public transit, cycling or carpooling, for example. The first option is more difficult to arrange alter-economically, but the other two can offer more flexible and creative solutions. It is important to remember that this section is also deeply tied to people's physical abilities, as well as where they are located in the city : two factors that can potentially play into a dynamic of marginalization.

Implementation strategies
- Create a fund for STM subscriptions ;
- Have a fleet of VC bicycles (including electric) coordinated by a reservation system ;
- A communal car under VC's name coordinated by a reservation system.

See post-its "Electric assist cargo trike", "Transit", "Access to transportation"

Transportation

Transportation refers to residents' ability to move material across distances. This can happen in a motorized way or non-motorized way (for ex., a truck vs. a bike trailer), which presents a more carbon-intensive option over another but also a more accessible option over another (for ex., people's ability to drive a bike cargo in the city).

Implementation strategies
- A communal bicycle trailer coordinated by a reservation system ;
- A communal truck under VC's name coordinated by a reservation system;
- A fund for UHAUL rentals.

See post-its "A truck", "Transportation (cargo bike, shared truck, etc)"

Secure housing

This category fits within our ambitions to provide rent-free housing, as a way to provide more time and freedom for value-driven workers. Nonetheless, this need wasn't mentioned as frequently as anticipated, which could potentially be a reflection of several factors : some value-driven workers might already have secure housing, are not in a position to move to a new temporary residence, are not comfortable asking or don't imagine themselves changing lifestyles.

Implementation strategies
- Prepare in-house residencies in progressive stages ;
- Identify prospective in-house residents
- Diversify housing arrangements (PWYC, 30% of revenue rate, solidarity rent, complementary currencies rent, ...) ;
- Host another workshop to further flesh out this question.

See post-its "Guaranteed housing", "Rent money for "shelter"", "A roof over my head (security)"

Access to knowledge

While this resource can be facilitated through access to experts and mentors, we should also provide the infrastructure for access to articles, books and other informational media. There are many post-its associated with this category but most of them came from a single participant. The need for accessible information is worth mentioning, which hints at the need to not only provide information platforms but also to show how to use them, and balance academic sources with more accessible sources of information.

Implementation strategies
- Purchase subscriptions to academic online platforms, library membership, newspaper / magazine subscriptions, and more
- Develop a Resource List outlining available platforms (including free ones), what they are useful for, how to use them, etc.

See post-its "Knowledge of available resources", "Blogs", "Reliable information", 'News streams", "Graphs", "Data", "Published results", "Numeric simulation", "Robust calculation", "More vocabulary (French/English)", "Visualization", "More accessible education"

External expriences

Experiences outside VC can help residents find inspiration and well-being in ways VCDC cannot provide. In this sense it is important to recognize that we won't be able to offer everything residents want or need. For this we must be open to 'off-loading' or 'sub-contracting' other groups or places to help our residents.

Implementation strategies
- Establish protocols to determine what VCDC can provide access to ;
- Based on protocol, work case-by-case, on requests ;
- Integrate this possibility in Library of Strategies.

See post-its "Yearly retreat to align spiritually", "Mind-opening experiences", "Access to cultural events", "Music"

Platforms

This category reflects the need for residents' work to exceed the immediate community of VC and reach other communities, institutions and people in positions of power.

Implementation strategies

- VC's webpage broadcasts people's work, - each one has a blog page they can add to as they wish ;
- In-house publishing ;
- VCDC act as facilitators to reinforce connections to external bodies.

See post-its "Forum for knowledge", "Publishing platform", "institutions", "Connection to the city's waste management"

Certifications

The need for certifications is likely to be occasional and can be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Implementation strategies

- Case-by-case

See post it "Ethics"

Conclusion

While still in its early stages, Value Collective is and will continue to be a heterogeneous entity, shaped by the many voices that compose it. That is why a collective activity such as the one outlined in this report is an essential step in defining the organisation's foundational principles. The raw data that emerged provides an important set of pragmatic considerations for VC's operations, but most importantly offers insight into the landscape of alter-economic activity and the tools needed to bolster it.

Indeed, this document offers at once a transcript of this data (see the linked Miro map), as well as broader, analytical reflections on the implications of these results. For instance, many participants mentioned the need for interpersonal support and networks, which points to an underlying need for stronger communities and social infrastructures; the need for workspace highlights larger implications about the management, exclusivity and financialized nature of real estate; the need for time implies wider considerations of how socio-cultural rhythms impact our ability to answer our needs and desires; and so forth.

We believe that more studies and exercises of this sort are necessary to shift cultural value systems and economic ideals. It is by putting unconventional economic actors (i.e. value-driven workers) in the spotlight and contextualizing them within broader themes of economic transformation, ecological transition, and social justice, that we can spur the movement towards more caring, mutualistic, less extractive and more cooperative cultures.
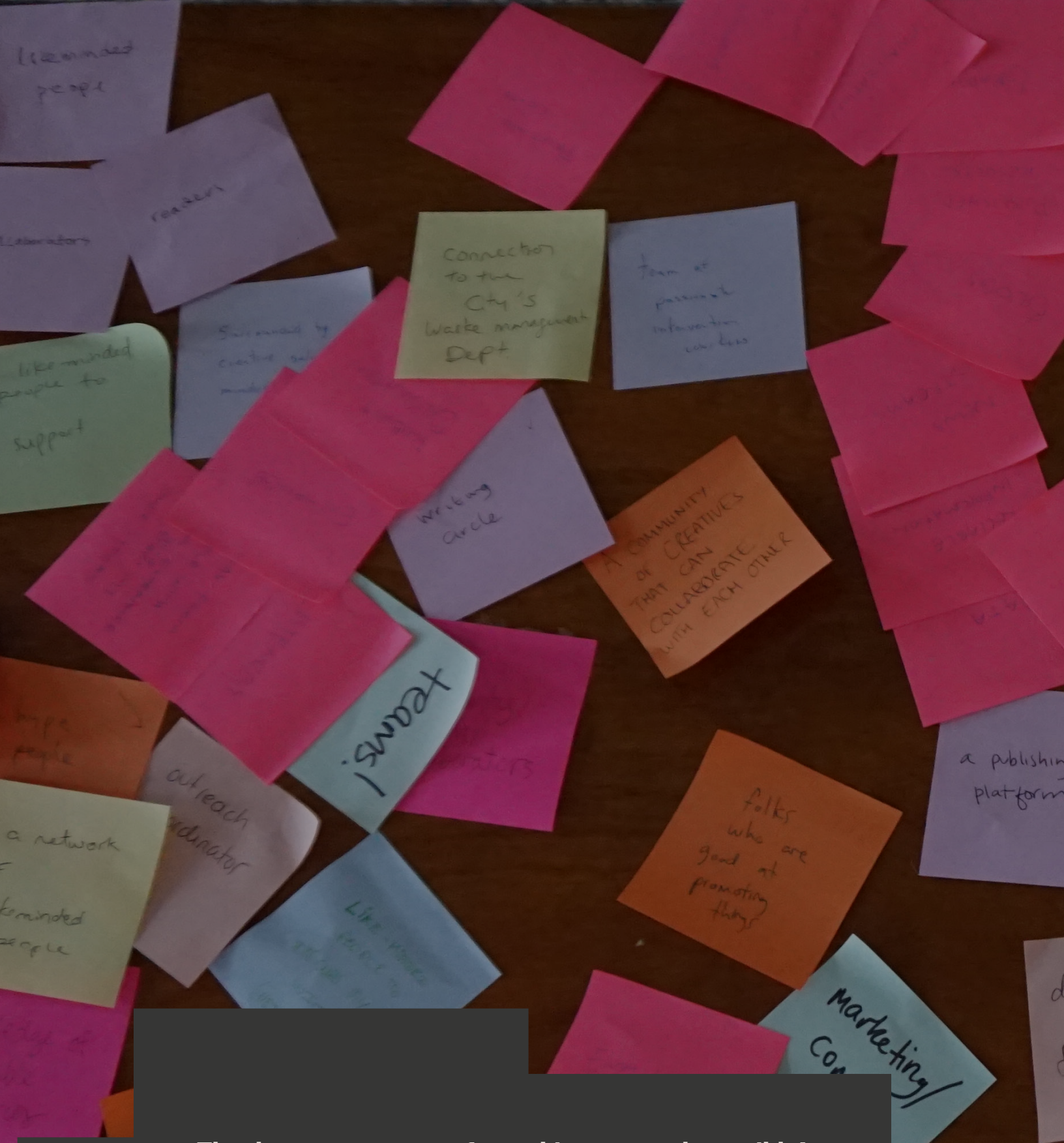
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