

Meet our Director, Sufina Ahmad

(4 minute read)

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Sufina joined the Foundation on 6 January 2020 as our Director. The profile below is a way of getting to know her a little better.

What is your role and what does it involve?

I am Director of the John Ellerman Foundation. I work with our team and our Trustees to ensure that annually we make around £5.8m of grants in support of amazing organisations with national significance that are committed to and passionate about the arts, social action and the environment. Our income comes from our endowment which is managed by our appointed Fund Managers. Our team is small, and my priorities are to: ensure we have effective governance, team and organisational processes and practices in place; manage the endowment through our fund managers in a way that aligns to our values; and raise the profile of the organisation so that we are well understood externally. I am also directly involved in the assessment and management of our grants, which I really enjoy!

How long have you been in that role and what did you do previously?

I am still very new! I joined on 6 January 2020 – before joining I worked for the City of London Corporation in corporate strategy and performance. I worked on the development and delivery of work relating to the organisation's societal, economic and environmental aims. I was really lucky to have worked on issues as diverse as: climate action, culture, digital skills, education, homelessness, philanthropy, responsible business, social mobility, volunteering and more. I have also worked for City Bridge Trust, the National Lottery Community Fund and older people and learning disabilities charities.

What are some of the challenges of being a Director?

Hard to say really – of course, being a new leader of an organisation during the Covid-19 pandemic is challenging. The team and trustees are essentially still getting to know me, whilst we also make decisions about how we respond to something that is new and unknown to us all!

In all honesty though, prior to the pandemic, my answer would have simply been that there are none. I know that sounds horribly naïve, but the reality is that since joining I have only seen opportunities. I have joined a fantastic funder that has a highly

impressive team, utterly committed Trustees, a compelling and ambitious funding strategy and amazing grantees. As a result, there are so many opportunities for us to explore together.

Since joining the Foundation, what working achievement or initiative are you most proud of?

It's hard to pick just one! The team is kind, supportive and motivated to do great work. In the last few months, we have been joined by a new Grants Manager and a new Office Manager/Executive Assistant. I am very pleased with how we continue to connect and work together, despite the significant changes that are caused by new people joining a small team, alongside working remotely due to the pandemic. It is testament to the team that while the pandemic has disrupted our working routines, we have still launched a grantee perception survey, which received a 57% response rate, uploaded our grants data to 360Giving and have nearly finalised our new Investment Policy, as well as progressing various other important workstreams. I feel that our Covid-19 response has been credible and effective, and you can read more about that [here](#), and a particular highlight for me has been our investment into the Resourcing Racial Justice Fund.

Describe an average day as a Director ...

Well, with or without the pandemic, I guess there are some regular patterns emerging as I settle into my new role. I have a daily 'to-do' list that I work through, which is taken from a weekly 'to do' list, which is part of a much bigger list that spans the longer-term. I think it is essential to really understand your short, medium and long-term priorities, and to adapt these flexibly when needed! I spend most days checking in with the team generally via emails or 'face-to-face/virtual' chats, as well as through weekly team or grants team meetings and one-to-ones. I spend good chunks of my day in externally focussed meetings, with other funders, other charities and organisations from other sectors too, that relate back to the work we do and the areas we fund in. I make space in each day to keep on top of my inbox and to work on written work, like reports, proposals, assessments etc. that I know need to get done.

What is your desk like, what is on it?

I miss my desk and our lovely office more generally – although I was pleasantly surprised when I returned to the office recently for a day to find that our plants had mostly survived, which is a relief as they are a most life affirming presence! Along with the obvious items, I always have paper and coloured pens to hand to map out projects I am working on. I have cards from friends and people we work with displayed, which make me smile. My desk always needs tidying up by the end of the day, as it gets messy and cluttered during the day as I go from one activity to the next.

Outside of work, how do you relax?

Being with friends and family is such an important part of how I unwind – pre-pandemic that would have involved going out for meals or drinks, going to the theatre or to comedy/music gigs, day trips or weekends away and going for long walks. Exercising, reading, listening to podcasts, calligraphy, embroidery and watching TV help me to relax too.

What was the last book you read?

I enjoy reading! I tend to have several books on the go, and so the books I have finished reading around the same time are: Sally Rooney's Normal People, Hillary Cottam's Radical Help and Henry Timms and Jeremy Heimans' #NewPower.

If you could pick one word that best sums up your role, what would it be?

Evolving.