

Government increases accessibility to volunteering

- Funding to improve access to volunteering through more opportunities, improved training allocation and resourcing
- Minister for Civil Society marks fund as an 'important step' in ensuring equal access for all

The Government has launched a £7 million fund with Arts Council England, Pears Foundation and NHS Charities Together to help people access more volunteering opportunities across a range of sectors including the arts and sport, Civil Society Minister Nigel Huddleston announced today.

The Volunteering Futures Fund, which includes almost £6 million directly from the Government, and £1.15 million contributed by Pears Foundation and NHS Charities Together, will provide opportunities to a diverse range of people, recognising that there are people across the country facing barriers to volunteering. The fund will have a strong focus on young people, those experiencing loneliness, those with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Organisations who run projects across the arts, heritage, museums, libraries, sport, civil society and youth sectors are encouraged to apply. These include nationwide projects to create placements for young people, in addition to more regional and local projects, such as those working with a particular football club to provide volunteering opportunities.

Arts Council England will be distributing £4.7 million of the fund provided by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and have today launched their competition for Expressions of Interest, welcoming bids for £100,001 or above, for organisations to fund the training and support necessary to deliver high quality volunteering projects.

In addition to the £4.7 million of grants which ACE will administer, DCMS has awarded Pears Foundation and NHS Charities Together with £1.15 million. The two grant makers are also adding to the total themselves with a further £1.15 million, bringing the combined fund to £7 million.

Minister for Civil Society, Nigel Huddleston, commented:

Making volunteering opportunities accessible to all is an important step towards levelling up this country.

There are so many benefits to volunteering such as improving mental health, learning new skills and becoming part of a community.

I urge organisations to apply for grants through Arts Council England, to develop and deliver high quality volunteering opportunities.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport sectors rely greatly on the hard work and dedication of volunteers to deliver vital services in youth, charity, sports, and arts sectors. There are also undeniable benefits of volunteering, including building new skills, improving mental well-being and opportunities to connect with new people, and join social networks, all whilst contributing towards society.

Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair at Arts Council England, said:

Volunteers are at the core of the cultural sector, and help to make possible many of the creative and cultural events beloved by people all over the country. We know that volunteering can also have huge benefits for physical, mental and emotional health, and so we're delighted to work with DCMS to administer this fund, and help to further spread the benefits of volunteering to people from all backgrounds, in all parts of the country.

Ellie Orton OBE, Chief Executive at NHS Charities Together, said:

Volunteering is the lifeblood of our communities and has really important personal benefits too, from meeting new people to improving your mental health. This fund offers a much-needed boost to help young people from all backgrounds access life-changing volunteering opportunities, and we're excited to be part of it.

We support a network of 240 NHS Charities across the UK – many of which have unparalleled expertise in delivering youth volunteering schemes – and we look forward to working with them to get these funds to where they are needed most, and can have the greatest impact. This includes increased support for our NHS workforce, as they face their most challenging winter ever.

Sir Trevor Pears CMG, Executive Chair, Pears Foundation, said:

For so many civil society organisations, volunteers are the backbone of their work; the extraordinary volunteer response to Covid-19 has only served to emphasise this. Now, as we look forward, it's crucial that we support these organisations to build on that response, remove remaining barriers to recruitment, and further develop the infrastructure to support and invest in their volunteers.

We are delighted to be working in partnership again with DCMS to support some of our long-term Partners in this work, delivering projects to develop volunteering opportunities for, and for the benefit of, people with disabilities and young people.

Following Expressions of Interest, Arts Council England will award grants by the end of March 2022, kicking off two years of activities.

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