Government Equalities Office Returners Fund

Overview
In the Spring Budget 2017, the Prime Minister committed £5 million to "promote returnships to the public and private sectors, helping people back into employment after a career break."
The funding was allocated to the Government Equalities Office (GEO) for the purpose of:

- better understanding the returner cohort, what barriers it faces and what employers can do to harness its skills and experience;
- increasing understanding of what is most effective in getting returners back to work across the private sector and in particular employment sectors;
- increasing public awareness of the skills and experience returners offer; and
- increasing the number of employment opportunities available to returners.

The Government Equalities Office defines a 'Returner' as a person who left paid employment for at least a year to take on a caring responsibility and would like to return to paid work. A returner may also be somebody who left paid employment for at least a year, but who has since returned to paid work at a lower skill level.

Please be aware this is a distinct group and not simply individuals not in education, employment or training. Eligible projects must demonstrate that they will be focussed solely on returners.

The caring responsibility may be for children, elderly or sick relatives. Analysis of the Labour Force Survey shows that 89% of those who are economically inactive because they are caring for family or the home are women.

The Returners Fund outlined below complements the wider work of the Government Equalities Office of supporting returners in the public sector (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/career-break-returner-programmes-launched-to-help-people-back-to-work) and closing the gender pay gap (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gender-pay-gap-reporting-goes-live).

Round 3 of the Returners Fund
Grants Available

In 2018 the Government Equalities Office (GEO) launched 2 rounds of funding under the Returners Fund, jointly worth £1.5 million to support organisations working with returners.

The Government Equalities Office is making a further budget available of up to £500,000 under Round 3 of the programme. This will support organisations to run projects aimed at **returners** from **groups facing the greatest disadvantage.** Projects are expected to:

- Create new job opportunities within the private sector that could not otherwise be established by the market;
- Address specific barriers for returners that can be replicated at scale;
- Demonstrate self-sustainability beyond the initial funding period of the grant; and
- Develop an understanding of how best to support a) returners to gain paid employment and b) employers to recruit and support returners.

It is anticipated that most of the grant recipients under the Returners Fund will be voluntary and community sector organisations and social enterprises working in partnerships. We anticipate 5-7 projects to be selected in total.

Under Round 3 the Government Equalities Office is looking to support potential Returners from groups who face persistent barriers to returning to work, such as:-

- People who speak little to no English
- People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- People with no recourse to public funds due to their immigration status, but who have the right to work
- People with substance abuse support needs
- People with mental or physical health issues
- Victims of domestic abuse
- Ex-offenders
- People in challenging economic circumstances
- People who experience multiple barriers due to their gender, and their faith, sexual orientation and/or gender identity

This is not an exhaustive list and GEO will consider applications aimed at supporting Returners from any groups who face multiple and persistent barriers to employment. However, all must be able to be classed as Returners as defined by GEO (above). Of particular interest are women who, for whatever circumstances, experience isolation or marginalisation. This could be due to one or combination of factors such as the ones listed above.

Projects also must be able to demonstrate strong partnerships with employers with an outcome of job opportunities as a result of this funding. It is also important that they contribute to the GEO learning as to best practise approaches in supporting Returners.
GEO is also interested in working with potential Returners with protected characteristics, such as BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic), disabled people and older workers (age 50+), who also face multiple and persistent barriers to returning to work.

The presence of a protected characteristic does not necessarily equate to a person being 'marginalised' and we would expect potential bidders to justify their choice of which group to support. Therefore, projects will need to demonstrate that your beneficiaries are considered to be from groups facing significant barriers in returning to work.

Ideally, grant recipients will be organisations able to demonstrate experience of providing specialist support for returners, including training and retraining; recruitment/in-work support; changing hiring and employment practices; flexible working and job design, and/or reducing the gender pay gap. Organisations without this experience are still welcome to apply, but must be able to demonstrate that they can provide suitable support to Returners and/or employers of Returners.

The GEO welcomes projects with match funding in place, or a clear plan to achieve that funding. However, the funds you are applying for from GEO should be the primary source of funding for your project.

Government Equalities Office

Eligibility Criteria

1. All types of organisations that can demonstrate they can support Returners from marginalised groups are eligible. This will include voluntary and community sector organisations, local training providers, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), academic institutions, local authorities or private sector organisations. However, we expect due to the target beneficiaries that the majority will be from the voluntary and community sector.

2. The grant funding is only available for eligible projects which are delivered in <u>England</u>.

3. Projects must demonstrate how, if successful, they can expand and continue without further government funding.

4. Employers who receive either direct or indirect support that is beneficial must show consideration for self-funding and extending the programme beyond the initial funding from the Returners Fund, as well as sign up to the <u>GEO best practice framework for Employers supporting Returners</u>.

Success Criteria

GEO will determine the Returners Fund to have been a success if the grant investment provides:
*   increased opportunities for returners in the private sector; and,
*   increased understanding of the following:
    o   barriers Returners face getting roles and the best ways of overcoming these;
    o   barriers Returners face once in roles and the best ways of overcoming these;
    o   barriers employers face/perceive when hiring Returners and the best ways of overcoming them;
    o   barriers employers face/perceive when supporting Returners in roles and the best ways of overcoming them;
    o   benefits to employers of hiring Returners and the best way of communicating these;
    o   opportunities for Returners and employers are offered with a reasonable geographic distribution across England.

Please Note

*   Grants will be paid in arrears. Therefore, all applicants must have a secure cash flow – **a minimum of 3 months' operating costs held in reserve** or equivalent – to ensure the lead organisation's financial security.
*   The upper limit for grants is £100,000. It is anticipated the majority of awards to be between £50,000 and £100,000.
*   Successful applicants must adhere to the GEO requirements for monitoring and reporting of participant data. Projects invited to submit full applications will be provided with the necessary monitoring tools to enable them to comply with this requirement.

Exclusions

*   Grants cannot be used to cover any costs incurred in applying to this fund.
*   Grants will not be awarded retrospectively i.e. for any costs incurred before the grant agreement has been signed and returned.

- Organisations must have an organisation bank account. Funds will not be paid to individuals.
- Grants are available to support projects lasting a maximum of 12 months, with the anticipated length of the Returner focused element lasting 3-6 months. (See indicative timetable below).
- **Funding can only be used for the start-up costs of new projects, training, and related support for Returners.** It cannot be used to pay or subsidise the salaries of Returners which must be met in full by employer(s). These start-up costs could cover experimental approaches so long as there is a clear plan for sustainability and replication following the project's conclusion.

Indicative Timetable

Please note that the Round 3 application process differs from rounds 1 and 2. Whereas previously a two-step application process was involved, under Round 3 applicants will only be asked to submit full applications for consideration

Stage	Date
Application window opens for applicants	7th February 2019
Deadline for return of full applications	19th March 2019
Applicants notified of outcome	May 2019
Project delivery period begins (maximum of 12 months)	1 June 2019

If the timings deviate from these advertised dates, applicants will be informed as soon as possible.

Scoring

Criteria	Evidence Sought	Weighting
1. Organisation governance and 2. Financial assurance	• Charity Commission compliance (for registered charities) • Companies House compliance (for registered companies) • Latest annual accounts • Coherent and realistic budget offering value for money given the project's context and targets • Assurance of sufficient cash flow – (a minimum of 3 month's operating cash in reserves or a robust alternative (see application form).	Pass/Fail
3. Project	• Compliance/eligibility – clarity of understanding of the Fund and its objectives, well set out objectives and clear and achievable outputs • Indicative value for money	25%
4 Need and demand	• Coherence of plans to reach and engage target beneficiaries • Understanding of the needs of the Returner cohort and what support is required • Understanding of how employers can best support returners and evidence or likelihood of their engagement, as well an indication of relevant support to employers	30%

	• Rationale for requiring public subsidy/intervention in the form of a grant from the Returners Fund (ie given gaps in the market)	
5. Partnership and Project Management	• A clear project plan • Examples of the lead organisation's experience of delivering projects in partnership with others, including employers, and designed to meet the needs of marginalised groups • Appropriate partners are identified with a clear rationale for their involvement, their anticipated roles and responsibilities along with assurance of obtaining their commitment to support the project • Clear governance arrangements and assurance of quality and delivery	20%
6. Impact and sustainability	• Consideration of how the project proposes to embed monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate the value and impact of the project • Consideration of how the project could be scaled up in terms of the future involvement of returners and/or employers • Consideration for how the project can be sustained financially i.e with employers continuing to support returners following the initial grant from the Returners Fund	25%
TOTAL		**100%**

Please see the application form for more information on how each section will be weighted.

Please note that as this will be a one-step application process, and, unlike in previous rounds, applicants will not be required to produce fully developed logic models prior to application. Instead, successful applicants will be expected to work with the external programme evaluators, SQW, post approval, to develop evaluation plans to ensure that the impact and outcomes of their projects are measured and evaluated.

How to Apply

Access the application portal: **here**

Further guidance is provided within the on-line Application form and in the FAQs Frequently asked questions.

If you need any support in completing your application, please email the grants team: returnersfund@rocketsciencelab.co.uk

Alternatively you can ring: 020 3291 3021 and a member of the team will get back to you. The Team can receive a high volume of enquiries in the run up to an application deadline so please be patient if your enquiry is not replied to immediately, all efforts will be made to respond to you as swiftly as possible.