



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.” This funding has been 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 at a level commensurate with their skills and experience. 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. 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>).

Grants Available

A Fund of £1.5million is available for organisations to run projects aimed at returners that:

- create new job opportunities within the private sector and targeted employment sectors that have a weaker track record in catering for returners, including, retail; law; tech and telecoms; science, technology, engineering and maths industries; creative industries;
- could not otherwise be established by the market;
- address specific barriers for returners and can be replicated at scale;
- can demonstrate self-sustainability beyond the initial funding period of the grant;
- increase 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, social enterprises and training providers. Approximately 15-18 projects will be selected in total. There will be two funding rounds, one in the spring and one in the autumn 2018 (please see the indicative timetable below).



The GEO is particularly interested to receive project applications that focus on at least one of the following:

- returners to paid employment outside London (full or part-time);
- non-graduate returners and/or those returning to non-professional employment;
- people with the following protected characteristics:
 - BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic)
 - Disabled
 - Older workers (aged 50+)
- returners who have been out of paid employment for 10 years or more, and
- creating employment opportunities for returners in SMEs.

Ideally, grant recipients will be organisations that can 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.

Eligibility Criteria

1. All types of organisations that can demonstrate they can support returners 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.
2. The grant funding is only available for eligible projects which are delivered in England.
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 [GEO best practice framework](#).

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:
 - barriers returners face getting roles and the best ways of overcoming these;
 - barriers returners face once in roles and the best ways of overcoming these;



- barriers employers face/perceive when hiring returners and the best ways of overcoming them;
- barriers employers face/perceive when supporting returners in roles and the best ways of overcoming them;
- benefits to employers of hiring returners and the best way of communicating these;
- opportunities for returners and employers are offered with a reasonable geographic distribution across England.

Please Note

- Grants will be paid monthly in arrears. Therefore, all applicants must have a secure cash flow – **a minimum of 3 months’ operating costs held in reserve** – to ensure the lead organisation’s financial security.
- The upper limit for grants is £300,000. However, it is anticipated the majority of awards to be between £50,000 and £150,000.
- Successful applicants must adhere to the Government Equalities Office 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, but which may well be for a shorter duration. (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

First Round:

Stage	Date
Expressions of interest (EOI) open to applicants	5 th Mar 2018
Deadline for return of an EOI to be considered in the first round	30 th Mar 2018
Applicants notified of the outcome of their EOI	w/c 9 th Apr 2018
Application window opens for shortlisted applicants	w/c 9 th Apr 2018
Deadline for return of full applications	18 th May 2018
Applicants notified of outcome	w/c 25 th Jun 2018



Project delivery period begins (maximum of 12 months)	1 st Aug 2018
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Second Round:

Stage	Date
Deadline for submission of an EOI for the second round	16 th Aug 2018
Applicants notified of the outcome of their EOI	w/c 3 rd Sept 2018
Application window opens for shortlisted applicants	w/c 3 rd Sept 2018
Deadline for return of full applications	26 th Oct 2018
Applicants notified of outcome	w/c 8 th Dec 2018
Project delivery period begins (maximum of 12 months)	1 st Jan 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charity Commission compliance (for registered charities) Companies House compliance (for registered companies) Latest annual accounts Governing documents Coherent and realistic budget offering value for money given the project's context and targets Assurance of sufficient cash flow – a minimum of 3 months' operating costs held in reserve 	Pass/Fail
3. Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compliance/eligibility – clarity of understanding of the Fund and its objectives Indicative value for money 	15%
4. Need and demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherence of plans to reach and engage target audience Understanding of the returner cohort and what support is required Understanding of how employers can best support returners and evidence or likelihood of their engagement Rationale for requiring public subsidy/intervention in the form of a grant from the Returners Fund (ie given gaps in the market) 	30%
5. Partnership and Project Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear project plan 	15%



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examples of the lead organisation's experience of delivering projects in partnership with others, including employers• 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	
6. Impact and sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 ie with employers continuing to support returners following the initial grant from the Returners Fund	30%
7. Track Record of project delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evidence of delivery of demand-led projects which are relevant to the objectives of the Returners Fund• Evidence of successful meeting of grant-funded outcomes in previous projects' delivery• Verification of referees	10%
TOTAL		100%

How to Apply

Access the application portal: [here](#)

Further guidance is provided within the on-line Expression of Interest form and Application form.

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.