



**VOLUNTEER
ACADEMY**

Highland Third
Sector Interface

Fellowship Application Guidance



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Intention of the Fellowship

The Highland Volunteer Academy Fellowship aims to gather valuable insights and learning from outside the Highland region and bring them back to strengthen our local volunteering approach and framework. This initiative is inspired by the need to address the challenges faced across the volunteering sector in Highland; and wider across the whole of the UK.

National trends show a decline in volunteer participation rates, and anecdotal evidence suggests this is also occurring in Highland. This decline strains community services and initiatives. Support mechanisms for volunteers are often reported as inadequate, leading to burnout and lower retention. Traditional volunteering models are outdated, necessitating new approaches to revitalise the culture and infrastructure of volunteering in Scotland.

By facilitating learning visits and research, the Fellowship seeks to encourage innovation and rethinking in our volunteer practices, ultimately fostering a more robust and effective volunteering ecosystem in Highland.

The Highland Volunteer Academy Fellowship programme is designed to support individuals currently involved in volunteer participation and community work here in Highland, offering grants to facilitate learning visits and research. We encourage applications that demonstrate a clear potential for advancing volunteer practices and promoting meaningful change within Highland. This guidance will help you prepare a comprehensive application.

The Fellowship

Becoming a Fellow entails more than merely visiting a location and reporting on it. It involves embracing the concept that by sharing our learning experiences, both positive and challenging, we can enhance our collective efforts. A Fellow should be an individual who values learning, commits to dedicating time and effort to share their experiences with others, and is willing to challenge the current practices and context of volunteering. We invite all applicants to consider their connection to the values of the Fellowship:

- **Learning** reinforces our actions.
- **Exchange and Sharing** are crucial for development and relationships.
- **Improvement** is a continuous process, typically achieved through incremental changes.
- **Challenge** is essential for change and enhancement.

As a Fellow, an individual is selected to embark on a learning journey aimed at strengthening volunteering practices and support within Highland. They are asked to make a commitment to gathering knowledge through direct research and study of practice outside Highland. Through the formal documentation of this research and the dissemination of learning we can challenge new ideas and thoughts. Fellows will also be expected to be able to participate in the Academy Lecture series of asked to do so.

Who Can Be A Fellow

There are some basic eligibility criteria below, which each Fellow must meet, but beyond this, a Fellow needs to be someone who understands and is invested in volunteering. They need to be passionate about the difference volunteers make and the importance of their work in relation to society, community and the wider world.

Ideally, while a Fellow is someone who may not have been involved in writing reports or academic papers in the past, they are confident and capable of writing about their learning experiences, contrasting and comparing approaches and forming recommendations around how change could make a positive difference. This means they need to be effective in written communication. They ought to be inquisitive and potentially someone who is confident in speaking publicly (but this isn't a requirement).

The most important thing is that the candidate is a person who is in a position where they can leverage change. This can be big strategic change, but we understand that sometime the most interesting changes are much smaller and

start with a smaller group of people, on a very local level; and that is just as interesting. They must be willing to be open about the need for change, and this is why we ask if they have the support of their organisation, where presumably the changes may take place.

Eligibility Criteria

Applications for the Highland Volunteer Academy Fellowship are open to individuals who meet the following criteria:

- Must be over 18 years of age
- Currently in a voluntary or paid employment role within the Third Sector in Highland
- Intend to continue being in their post, or similar, within Highland, for a minimum of 12 months
- Must be physically based in Highland
- Must have written support from their organisations that confirms they are open to adopting the learning developed as part of the Fellowship
- Paid staff and volunteers within HTSI are not eligible to apply in this capacity.

This ensures that applicants are actively engaged in the community and committed to contributing to the ongoing development of volunteer practices in the region.

Applicants will also have to provide confirmation of their right to work/volunteer in the UK separately to the initial application. They will also have to provide details of a UK bank account in their name should they progress to stage two.

Timeline and Reporting

The Fellowship options will be advertised for a minimum of twelve weeks and once applications are submitted, it could take up to a further ten weeks for decisions to be made.

Once the offer of a Fellowship is made, a Fellow will have up to six months to finalise plans, undertake their learning journey and complete their report write up. If for some reason this was not a practical timeline, then a revised proposal should be included in the application.

Once the Fellow has completed their report and financial return, the report will be checked, and when agreed, published on the Volunteer Academy Fellowship website. Personal contact details for the Fellows will not be included online, but

your full name, a short summary and a picture will be, ensuring full learning credit. This also ensures a record of past Fellows within the Academy for future reference.

After the Fellowship

The Volunteer Academy hosts twice yearly lecture series, depending on the themes and relevance you may be asked to provide a lecture on your learning experience. This is a critical way to share your learnings and key messages with others. These are hybrid events, but should you be approached to present your learning, you would be asked to attend and deliver your lecture in person.

Beyond this you may be asked to participate in other events, either through the Volunteer Academy/HTSI or directly from others. You are not required to accept these invitations as part of the conditions of the Fellowship, but you are encouraged to remain open to sharing as part of the values of the Fellowship approach.

Fellows will remain on our bank of Fellows and will receive invites to future events or be given the chance to contribute to policy and decision-making, should opportunities arise.

Support for Fellows

If you would appreciate a chance to speak to the team before you begin your journey or as you prepare your report then please know we are here to help.

We may be able to lend equipment if you need this, provide advice or support with practical things - such as proof reading and formatting - or even space to think and work quietly once you are back.

Fundamentally, please just get in touch to see if we can help, and we will always be there to help with the reporting process and particularly as a critical friend and proof reader.

How to Apply

Applications for a Fellowship should be made in writing in an MS Word document including the section headings detailed below. The document (called the Learning Outline Plan) should not exceed 3 pages of narrative, excluding a front page should you choose to include one, and include an additional one page detailed budget. An appendix of the following should also be included in the submission:

- Letter from your origin organisation confirming support for and interest in learning and adapting to your findings as part of the learning fellowship. If you have identified a wide group of beneficiaries, potentially a partnership or collaboration, then you can include those as well.
- Confirmation from your potential host organisation(s) that they are, in principle, interested and willing to host you as a Fellow to learn from their approach.
- A signed copy of the Terms and Conditions statement, downloadable from the Fellowship Section of the Volunteer Academy webpages.

Sections to include in your Learning Outline Plan:

The Fellowship You Are Applying For

Please be clear about the Fellowship you are applying for. Details of open Fellowships are available on the Volunteering Academy website:

<https://www.highlandtsi.org.uk/volunteer-academy>

Personal Details

Include your full name, contact information, and a brief biography outlining your background, experience, and current role within your organisation. Highlight any unique skills or qualifications that make you a suitable candidate for the Fellowship.

Details of Your Role

Provide a detailed description of your current role and responsibilities. Emphasise your ability to leverage change following your learning journey. Explain how your position enables you to impact volunteer practices and community engagement. Include examples, if applicable, of past projects or initiatives where you have successfully implemented change.

Proposal of Fellowship Activities

Outline your proposed learning activities in detail. This plan should include the following sections but is not restricted to this:

- **Learning Objectives:** Clearly state what you aim to learn and how it aligns with the goals of the Fellowship.
- **Location and Duration:** Specify where and when your learning journey will take place. Mention the institutions or organisations you plan to visit and the duration of each visit.
- **Host Organisation:** Confirm that you have spoken to any host organisation and obtained their agreement in principle. Provide details about the host organisation, including their role in your learning journey and how they will support your objectives.
- **Existing Research:** Provide some outline of the work you have already undertaken to identify existing learning and research in place and how you may add value to that.

Expected Impact

Describe the difference you hope to make by undertaking this learning journey. This section should address the problem you aim to solve or the area you wish to improve. Highlight the anticipated outcomes and how they will benefit the Highland volunteering community.

Budget

Provide a detailed budget that outlines all expected expenses related to your learning activities. Ensure to include travel costs, accommodation, materials, subsistence costs and any other relevant expenditures. Additionally, if your costs are being supported from an alternative source or you are yourself adding funds to this, provide information on any other funding sources you have secured or are seeking and at what stage their approval is at.

Please note that the Fellowship finances cannot be used for any of the following, this is not an exhaustive list and budgets will form part of the scrutiny:

- To cover salary costs or equivalent, this includes contributions to pensions, NI etc.
- Purchase capital items i.e. Camera, phone, Laptop etc. (Small items of stationary are permissible if these can not be supplied through other means)
- Rent or Mortgage payments, only accommodation costs associated for the person undertaking the Fellowship learning visit are permissible and where accommodation has been shared only the proportional costs associated with the Fellow can be claimed.
- Personal car payments, repairs or maintenance, only petrol costs relevant to the travel incurred where public transport was not a reasonable alternative and with appropriate fuel receipts are permissible.

Please note that while the intention is to provide funding for costs up front, all budget items will have to be evidenced in the final submission. Failure to evidence costs will result in the need to refund unevidenced spend. Options will be made for HTSI to purchase travel and accommodation directly for Fellows if this was preferable, or for costs only to be paid in arrears with evidence submission.

Submission Process

To submit your application please send your Learning Plan Outline, as detailed above, your appendices and any other information you feel is relevant to volunteering@highlandtsi.org.uk with the Subject Title: **Fellowship Application**

Please note that confirmation of your right to work/volunteer in the UK will be sought subsequent to your application; but prior to the selection panel. Bank account information will be identified only for those successful through stage one.

Review and Selection

Applications will be reviewed in a two-stage process:

- **Stage One Sifting**
All applications will be initially reviewed by the Highland Volunteer Academy Fellowship Committee. Successful stage one applicants will be invited to present their ideas to the panel.
- **Stage Two Presentation:**
Invited applicants will have the opportunity to present their proposals to the Fellowship Committee, usually at the HTSI office in Dingwall. This presentation should highlight the key elements of their learning journey, expected impact, and detailed budget.

Learning Fellows will be expected to begin their learning journey within three months of being selected and will have six months to complete the process. Upon completion, Fellows are required to produce a report on their learning experiences. Detailed guidance on what this should include has been produced and will be provided to successful applicants.

Please note a copy of the statement is downloadable from the Fellowship Webpages and should be signed and attached to your application:

Terms and Conditions

The Highland Volunteer Academy is run by the Highland Third Sector Interface, a registered charity. Charity Number: SC043521

The offer of a Fellowship is conditional on the individual being able to provide evidence of their right to work/volunteer in the UK for a minimum of a further year from the date of the offer. It also requires the individual to have a UK bank account in their name and a UK home address that the bank is linked to.

Funding for costs will be provided upfront in most cases, however, if all budget items are not evidenced in the final submission, HTSI retain the right to request and if necessary seek legal action to recover a refund for the funding provided. You will also be provided with the opportunity to have HTSI book larger travel and accommodation costs up front or for costs to be paid in arrears depending on your preferences.

Learning Fellows must begin their learning journey within three months of being selected. Fellows have six months to complete the process, including the completion of the written report. Detailed guidance on the report's contents will be provided to successful applicants and can be downloaded from the Volunteer Academy website.

All activity and travel undertaken as part of the Fellowship are undertaken entirely at your own risk. You are responsible for ensuring you have in place appropriate risk assessments, insurances and training necessary to undertake your Fellowship safely and appropriately. HTSI accepts no liability for activities, travel or work undertaken as a result of your Fellowship.

These terms and conditions are designed to ensure a transparent and fair process for all participants in the Highland Volunteer Academy Fellowship. Please review them carefully before submitting your application.