

PRESS RELEASE

ACRE TO LEAD ON BIG LOTTERY FUNDED SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CAMPAIGN

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) has received close to £1.4 million from the Big Lottery Fund to lead a nationwide partnership of eight organisations that will help and inspire rural communities across the UK to set up social enterprises.

The two-year learning, outreach and engagement campaign comes on the back of Big Lottery Fund's Village SOS funding programme and will help communities start their own social enterprises – from setting up a shop or saving a pub to opening a café or cinema.

The focus of the campaign will be a 'community to community' learning network, which will see volunteers from social enterprises across the UK become mentors to share the secrets of their success.

The volunteers will offer their time, support, experience and expertise and will point new enterprises in the direction of potential funding sources.

A central 'Rural Hub', managed by ACRE, will match each new enterprise with a trained mentor and a local grassroots support organisation, who will offer support and advice ranging from how to plan a project to building a brand.

The grassroots support will be provided in England by ACRE's Network of 38 rural community councils; in Wales by Wales Council for Voluntary Action; in Scotland by Senscot and Forth Sector; and in Northern Ireland by Rural Community Network.

The campaign will be supported by a national expert panel, plus a new Village SOS website developed by The Rural Media Company, and will begin with a three-month research project led by consultants Rose Regeneration and Rocket Science.

The research aims to identify good practice and case studies from the first phase of the Village SOS campaign, launched in 2010, which saw more than 150 innovative village projects come to fruition. It will assess the demand for support for new enterprises and map what is available across the UK so that projects are directed to the best sources of advice and funding.

The research will include an online survey of a wide range of organisations to find out who might get involved in community enterprises - from parish councils and schools to broadband campaigners and social groups, such as Young Farmers and the WI.

ACRE chief executive Janice Banks said: "The ACRE Network and its Village SOS partners are trusted local voices with a great track record of helping rural communities to find innovative solutions to the unique challenges they face.

"Village SOS is all about communities helping each other and our approach will ensure that communities thinking about setting up a social enterprise will learn from and be inspired by someone who has been through it themselves and made a real difference to village life.

More follows

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"We are offering valuable time, support, experience and expertise, which is what communities tell us they really need. We'll help enterprises seek out sources of social investment funding, such as bonds or crowdfunding.

"Our aim is for Village SOS to leave a lasting legacy of self-supporting community enterprises that are helping rural villages to survive and thrive."

The Big Lottery Fund works to bring real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need, funding environment, health, education and charitable good causes across the UK.

By investing in this activity the Big Lottery Fund wants to help the rural social enterprise movement by giving village communities access to enterprise support and skills, encouraging them to join in, share and grow as part of a wider network. Community enterprises can provide sustainable solutions to an area's most pressing social and economic issues. By supporting this type of activity and through its funding routes the Big Lottery Fund wants to encourage local people to respond to local needs and opportunities and change the places they live for the better.

Village SOS is delivered by ACRE and its group of partners and funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

Ends

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Notes to editors:

Action with Communities in Rural England

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) is the national body for the 38 rural community councils (RCCs) who make up the ACRE Network. We speak up for rural communities on the national stage and deliver projects that enable our communities to find innovative solutions to the challenges they face.

Our rural community councils – many of whom date back 90 years – reach 50,000 organisations at grassroots level. ACRE was formed in 1987 to bring the RCCs together under one umbrella, harnessing the strength of their experience to support our national work.

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Follow us on Twitter: @ACRE_national

The Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund, the largest distributor of National Lottery good cause funding, is responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised for good causes by the National Lottery.

The Fund is committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need and has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK. Since its inception in 2004 BIG has awarded over £6bn.

In the year ending 31 March 2013, 28% of total National Lottery revenue was returned to the Good Causes. Since the National Lottery began in 1994, £31 billion has been raised and more than 400,000 grants awarded.

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