Place-Based Partnerships Manager: Applicant Q&A

This Q&A summarises the questions raised during our applicant webinar for the Place-Based Partnerships Manager Q and A Webinar. It should be read alongside the job pack, which contains full details of the role, person specification and recruitment process.

Are you recruiting one Place-Based Partnerships Manager or two?

We currently have approval to recruit one full-time Place-Based Partnerships Manager. Our organisational structure shows two posts because we hope to recruit a second manager, subject to Board approval.

If approval for the second post is received sufficiently quickly, we may be able to use this recruitment process to appoint to both roles. However, at present, only the first post has been formally approved.

How many partnerships will the new manager be responsible for?

Over an approximately 18-month period, we expect to develop and fund up to eight new partnerships, taking our planned number of partnerships to approx. 8 – 12 partnerships. These would be shared across the Place-Based Partnerships Manager roles rather than all being managed by one person.

An important early part of this role will therefore be helping to develop and establish these new partnerships, rather than simply taking over an existing portfolio.

What does place-based partnership working mean at Smallwood Trust?

Our approach is based on intentional collaboration for a purpose, rather than simply creating networks of organisations.

Typically, a small number of organisations in a place come together around one or two significant issues where they believe collaborative action could make a disproportionate difference for women. This might involve changing local practice, influencing policy, improving commissioning or addressing another systemic barrier.

Smallwood Trust has been developing and facilitating this approach over a number of years, and this next phase is an expansion of that work.

How will the locations for new partnerships be selected?

This is not a conventional open funding programme based primarily on fixed eligibility criteria.

We take a place-based development approach, which involves understanding the local landscape, convening organisations and having conversations with potential partners before a partnership is established.

While organisations must meet our basic funding eligibility requirements, the process is much more about understanding the local context, identifying organisations with the potential to work effectively together and exploring what meaningful place-based change could look like.

Who might be involved in a partnership?

The composition of each partnership will depend on what it is trying to achieve and who needs to be involved to help achieve that goal.

Women's organisations are at the heart of our approach, but this does not necessarily mean that every funded partner must be a women's organisation. For example, one existing partnership includes a law centre because its expertise can contribute to understanding and challenging local legal practice affecting women.

Local authorities, businesses and other stakeholders may also be important to the wider ecosystem surrounding a partnership. We therefore start with the change the partnership wants to achieve and then consider who needs to be directly involved and who needs to be engaged or influenced.

What are the biggest opportunities and challenges facing the partnerships, and where can the new manager add most value?

The women's sector is operating in an extremely challenging environment, including significant pressure on funding alongside growing and increasingly complex needs of the women that the organisations support.

At the same time, women's organisations hold considerable knowledge about the systemic problems affecting women and what could change. Place-based partnerships create an opportunity to bring that knowledge together and enable organisations to address issues that are too complex for any single organisation to tackle alone.

The Place-Based Partnerships Manager will add value by developing strong relationships, understanding when partnerships need encouragement or constructive challenge, connecting their work to wider opportunities and relationships, and making sense of emerging learning and risk.

It is a role that requires judgement: understanding when to support, when to challenge, when to allow something time to develop and when an issue needs to be escalated.

Do applicants need experience of working in a women's organisation?

No. Previous experience of working in a women's organisation is not a requirement.

Transferable experience from other sectors, including areas such as health and social care, can be relevant.

Experience within women's organisations is equally welcome, but we do not have a preference for one route over another.

Are specific qualifications or professional credentials required?

No specific qualification or professional credential is required.

Do I have to live in the Midlands, North East or North West? Would you consider someone based in London?

Our starting point is that we want to recruit the best person for the role. Location is not being treated simply as a pass/fail requirement.

However, the role requires frequent travel across the Midlands, North East and North West, and knowledge and understanding of the regions is also relevant. The practicality and sustainability of travelling regularly between partnership locations would therefore form part of the discussion with shortlisted candidates.

How much travel should I expect?

We anticipate approximately one to two days of travel per week on average, probably closer to two.

It will not necessarily be evenly spread. Some weeks might involve three or four days of travel to make efficient use of visits, followed by a week with little or no travel.

Being present in place is an important part of the role. Smallwood Trust works as a relational funder, and building meaningful relationships with partners requires spending time with them in their communities.

How is travel undertaken?

Our preference is for colleagues to use public transport, particularly trains, wherever practical, to minimise environmental impact.

We recognise that public transport connections are not always suitable, particularly when travelling across some areas, so car travel may be appropriate where necessary.

Is the role available part-time?

The post currently being recruited is full-time.

If a second Place-Based Partnerships Manager post receives Board approval, we expect there to be greater flexibility around working hours for that role, including potentially considering 0.8 FTE.

Would compressed hours or other flexible working arrangements be possible?

We already have flexible working arrangements within the team, including a colleague working full-time hours compressed over four days.

We would discuss arrangements with the successful candidate and take a pragmatic approach. Any working pattern would also need to work alongside the relationship-based nature of the role and the availability of partner organisations.

Where does the team work?

Smallwood Trust is a fully remote organisation without a permanent office. Colleagues are home-based in different parts of the country and spend significant time visiting the organisations we fund.

The team meets face-to-face in Birmingham approximately once a month (and are reviewing adding other locations like Manchester to this rota of monthly meetings), usually for a full working day. We also have weekly online meetings and other learning and development spaces to help colleagues stay connected.

What is the organisational culture like?

We are a small, mission-focused team with a strong shared commitment to women and the women's sector. As a remote organisation, we are intentional about creating opportunities for colleagues to connect, learn and spend time together.

Smallwood Trust has also been through a significant period of growth and organisational development and is continuing to evolve. Applicants should therefore be comfortable working in a relatively small organisation where change, learning and development are ongoing.

Alongside the challenges of the work, there is real satisfaction in seeing partnerships strengthen: organisations building trust, supporting one another, developing stronger relationships with decision-makers and achieving positive change together.

How do you know whether a Place-Based Partnership is making progress when systemic change can take a long time?

We recognise that systems change is long-term and non-linear, so progress cannot be assessed solely through conventional quantitative targets. We draw on established approaches to evaluating place-based systems change and will also use our developing impact and learning framework. The key is to identify credible evidence of movement and progress while recognising that the ultimate systemic change may extend beyond the lifetime of an individual grant.

What should I include in my application?

Applicants are referred to the Job Pack.

Will the face-to-face interview involve a test or presentation?

The precise format of the second-stage interview had not been finalised at the time of the webinar.

Smallwood Trust does not generally use conventional recruitment tests. The face-to-face stage is intended to allow both the panel and candidates to get a stronger sense of one another, and candidates may be asked to explore their ideas or approach to particular aspects of the work.

When would you like the successful candidate to start?

We would like the successful candidate for the current post to start as soon as reasonably possible, while recognising that applicants who are already employed may need to serve a notice period.

There is not yet a confirmed timetable for a potential second appointment because that post remains subject to Board approval.

Can Smallwood Trust sponsor a successful candidate who requires a Skilled Worker visa?

Smallwood Trust holds a Skilled Worker sponsor licence.