



commonword cultureword crocus books

INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

Commonword is a nationally active writing development agency funded as a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) by Arts Council England (ACE). We are looking for up to three new members to join our Board as we look to plan for and expand our work to meet the challenges and inequalities faced by literature and the arts post Covid-19.

Areas of expertise sought are Digital Literature, Public Relations and Mental Health. This is an unpaid, volunteer position.

ABOUT COMMONWORD

BACKGROUND

Commonword is the UK's only black-led writing development organisation. We were established in 1977 with the aim of offering working class writers the chance to write their own stories in their own voices, and to see them in print. Since then, our work has steadily expanded to cover black¹, LGBT+ and disabled writers and writing.

Commonword finds and works with new and emerging writers locally, nationally and internationally across fiction, life writing, poetry, and spoken word. We have a record of innovation in support of the communities we serve, including:

- publishing our first openly gay novel in 1979
- holding the first poetry slam series in Manchester (and the second in the UK) in the mid-90s
- starting the UK's first conference for black writers and writing in 1990
- starting one of the UK's first diversity in children's writing prizes in 2010

Our success in finding writers and working with them to aid their development clearly shows that groups and communities marginalised and underrepresented within UK publishing and the arts do not lack talent or commitment. Rather, it is the attitudes and structural discrimination they face which excludes more than a handful from getting their work into print or production.

VISION

A more just and equitable society where *all* writers have the opportunity to have their work published or performed, and where everyone enjoys the right to access and enjoy literature.

MISSION

To find and develop new writers and emerging writers from marginalised groups, providing

¹ By black we mean a collective and political umbrella term for anyone who does not identify as white and who, as a consequence, lives with the effects of racial discrimination, inequality and prejudice.

them with the support and opportunities to become active participants in the UK's literary life and economy.

We achieve our mission through four strands of work:

- Talent development, investing in and advocating for aspiring, emerging and established writers, especially from backgrounds which are under-represented in publishing
- Community projects, providing participatory literary opportunities for everyone.
- Publications, through call outs, competitions and mentoring, as a platform for new and alternative voices and perspectives.
- Events of local, national and international significance, enabling the sharing of ideas and platforms for debate.

AIMS

- Empower writers and their voices, and champion anti-discriminatory practice and inclusion in literature.
- Increase participation and engagement of marginalised and under-represented groups in literature.
- Develop artistic excellence and innovation.
- Support the professional development of writers of all levels and abilities, providing opportunities for them to evolve their practice and experiment new ideas and approaches.
- Produce a programme that highlights the presence and contribution of writers from under-represented and marginalised groups.
- Build new audiences amongst groups traditionally not engaged with literature.
- Influence policy and decision-makers by advocating for structural change as the only meaningful way to advance anti-discriminatory and inclusive practice.
- Build financial sustainability and resilience.
- Create a culture in the company to minimise the company's environmental impact..

VALUES

We fulfil our mission through values that underpin all our work, relationships, creative development and partnerships:

Integrity and Inclusion

We are committed to individual and artistic integrity and inclusion. We promote pluralism and self-determination as key to artistic expression, encourage new approaches and ideas, and advocate for structural as well as individual change.

Creativity, Honesty and Openness

With a focus on individual creative experiment and risk, we inspire, challenge and support artistic development by writers of all backgrounds and abilities.

Collaboration and Resilience

We connect writers and communities together to help them learn from, inspire and support each other, expanding artistic possibilities, outcomes and lives through creative collaboration.

BOARD

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES OF BOARD MEMBERS

Directors will be expected to share their expertise and contacts in areas where gaps currently

exist. Commonword maintains a progressive Board focused on creativity and social justice and with a range of skills including: creative industries management, research, finance, arts infrastructure, governance, local knowledge, and creative writing.

Commonword is seeking to recruit Directors who are enthusiastic about its work; committed to the success of the organisation and recognise the responsibilities the role entails.

LEGAL STRUCTURE

CURRENT STRUCTURE

- The Board of Directors of Commonword is the governing body of the company which is a registered charity and non-profit company limited by guarantee. The Board of Directors is responsible for strategic decisions and oversight of the company's operation. Directors have limited liability.
- The Articles, (the Company's governing document), set out that there must be a minimum of three Directors, and there is no maximum number.
- The Company has a 'single tier' structure which means that the Company Directors are the only Company Members who are entitled to vote at General Meetings. The quorum for both Board meetings and General Meetings is three.
- The chair, secretary and treasurer are elected by the Board annually. The chair serves as the point of contact between the Board and the Executive team.
- Resignation from the Board is by writing to the Chair.

MEETINGS

- The Board will meet not less than six times a year. Ad hoc meetings can be called by the Executive team or the Chair in addition to regular scheduled meetings, although this is not the norm.
- Meetings will usually take place at the Commonword Office in Manchester, or by Zoom if, due to distancing requirements, it is not possible to meet in person.
- The Board will establish working parties or task groups as necessary and board members are encouraged to join a suitable group where possible.
- As a Commonword board member, you will be serving as a volunteer. This is an unpaid position, but reasonable travel and subsistence expenses incurred on Commonword business can be claimed.

BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES

The Board's primary, statutory remit is to review and question, advise on and enhance key areas of the company's work including:

- Vision, mission, aims, objectives
- Impact and legacies
- Business planning including fundraising
- Financial projections and accounts
- Policy development
- Legal matters

The secondary, and perhaps equally important, role of our Board is three-fold:

- To support the Executive & Artistic Director and the wider team in developing and producing the best possible outcomes for our beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- To contribute to the development of long term plans and projections.
- To better articulate our goals for the future while building a sustainable and thriving enterprise, more capable of protecting the company's assets and therefore mitigating risk.

BENEFITS FOR BOARD MEMBERS

- You will be welcome to attend any Company workshop, class, event or any other activity and will receive advance information about these.
- We understand your commitment to us and your investment of time. You will be entitled to reasonable expenses claims (i.e. travel and accommodation) when engaged on work on behalf of the Company.

MAKING AN APPLICATION

If you are interested in applying for this role, please submit an 'expression of interest' letter, addressing the following:

- Your professional history and areas of expertise you might bring to the Board.
- What knowledge, experience or interest you have in the non-profit or charitable sector.
- Any personal qualities, passions and ideas you might bring to the organisation.
- Why you want to champion the values and aims of our organisation.

Email expressions of interest to our Chief Executive, martin@cultureword.org.uk. If you'd like to discuss this opportunity first, please call Martin De Mello on 07507 808133.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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