

Tech to Connect

Tackling isolation
through innovation

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Department for
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The **Tech to Connect Challenge** ran from April 2019 to March 2020 and aimed to help civil society develop their early stage ideas for tech to enable more or better interactions between people. Technology can be alienating or divisive for those that are isolated, but it doesn't need to be that way. Tech to Connect was all about supporting civil society to translate their knowledge into good ideas for new ways to connect people.

The challenge prize helped ten finalists develop their ideas into working prototypes and plan for their implementation. The £1 million prize was split into £500,000 of business support with the other £500,000 being awarded as financial support – £25,000 grants for each finalist, plus a winning prize of £100,000 and two runner-up prizes of £75,000.

Runner Up of the Tech To Connect Challenge (£75,000 prize)

Chatty Cafe



Location

Manchester-based, with reach across the country

Our idea

Our project is designed to reduce social isolation by encouraging and creating opportunities for face-to-face interaction. It encourages cafes and other public venues to designate a 'Chatter & Natter' table, which is where customers can sit if they are happy to talk to other customers.

Technology is the most vital component of this solution as it is the first point of call for beneficiaries; it is where they can discover and learn about the scheme, search for their nearest Chatter & Natter table, and contact us. People can access the scheme's website in many languages, making it accessible for various groups – from migrants to international students and others. The website is also where venues join the scheme.

Who do we want to reach?

Our intended beneficiaries are the general public aged 18 or over with no upper age limit. They are of any gender and of any race, religion, profession, background or circumstance. They may have additional needs, be retired, widowed, in ill health, high earners, low earners – the scheme is aimed at all adult demographics of the population. We aim to be an inclusive project and therefore it is essential that we involve beneficiaries in our design, development and day-to-day operations. Questions are regularly asked via social media, polls, newsletters as well as through direct engagement with beneficiaries.

The story so far

The scheme started in April 2017 and has grown organically using social media. The funds received through the Tech to Connect Challenge have helped us to respond efficiently to customer and beneficiary demand; we have been able to really push our social media, to refresh and revamp our website with co-production from beneficiaries and to scale up the project throughout England and to roll out the initiative in new cafes.

What's next?

Through our website, we are expanding the scheme globally, and we now have Chatter & Natter tables in Canada, America, Gibraltar, Australia and Poland. We are also hoping to be able to implement our ambassador scheme. These people will support and showcase our work in their communities as we believe they are the key to ensuring we know what local communities want and need to make the Chatter & Natter tables work.

"To critics who say that technology is actually contributing to social isolation, we would say that although we are a digital company using tech to connect people, we are encouraging and offering spaces where face-to-face interaction can take place. Therefore, technology can be used positively to connect people who then have real life, human conversation. Instead of challenging or competing with tech, we are actively trying to make it easy to use."

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