

NUS sets aside \$6m to fund grads' ideas for a better world

Sandra Davie
Senior Education Correspondent

The National University of Singapore (NUS), which last week offered its graduating students jobs and paid traineeships to weather the expected recession, is rolling out a scheme for its recent graduates to innovate to create a better post-pandemic world.

Under the Innovation Challenge, the university is calling for proposals to champion 115 innovative projects, in a nod to the 115th anniversary of NUS' founding.

Good ideas will be given up to \$50,000 funding for six months. If the project takes off, the university is prepared to give further support, it said on Wednesday.

NUS graduates are invited to form teams and submit bold ideas "to show the way forward and help shape a better future for humankind" in the post-Covid-19 world.

Proposals can be submitted under three broad categories: making people better, making society better, and making the world better, which call for ideas on a range of topics.

They include improving home-based learning, fostering togetherness, tackling inequality, mitigating the effects of climate change, enhancing food security and ensuring post-Covid-19 safety.

Projects that address challenges that are of great relevance to Singapore and the world will be given priority.

The challenge is open to all NUS graduates from this year, last year and 2018.

Teams can consist of three to five people. Each selected project's grant can be used to pay a stipend of up to \$1,200 per month per project member for the duration of the project.

NUS president Tan Eng Chye said the challenge is an excellent opportunity for NUS graduates to contribute to the greater social good.

He stressed that it is an opportunity for students to turn the pandemic crisis brought on by the coronavirus into an opportunity.

"In Chinese, the word crisis, is composed of two Chinese characters signifying 'danger' and 'opportunity'," said Professor Tan.

"No doubt our students will be faced with challenging times. Usually by this time, even before they complete their exams, half of our students will have job offers. But our final-year students are not finding it so easy this year. But I hope they also see the opportunities."

Professor Ho Teck Hua, NUS senior deputy president and provost, said: "NUS graduates who come up with good ideas will have the opportunity to work with our partners to turn their ideas into reality, and have a lasting impact on society."

He said NUS is especially looking for interdisciplinary approaches that embrace multiple perspectives, including those from the arts and culture, health, social work, sports and technology.

"We look forward to receiving high-quality proposals and welcome interdisciplinary teams with graduates from different disciplines, to develop holistic solutions," he said.

The university is setting aside \$6 million to support the ideas and has lined up a panel to evaluate the ideas that are put forward. It includes Ms Melissa Kwee, chief executive officer of the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre; Ms Tan Li San, CEO-designate of the National Council of Social Service; and Professor Tommy Koh, ambassador-at-large and rector of Tembusu College at NUS.

The Innovation Challenge is part of the NUS Resilience and Growth Initiative announced last week by the university. It includes a Students Solidarity Fund to help needy students.

Prof Tan said the university is looking at topping up the bursaries of 1,700 students.

The university has also announced 200 full-time positions and 800 traineeships for its graduates.

It is also offering free courses for the graduating cohort and deferring the payment of tuition fees for those who want to further their education by taking master's degree courses.

sandra@sph.com.sg

Proposals can be submitted under three broad categories: making people better, making society better, and making the world better, which call for ideas on a range of topics. They include improving home-based learning, fostering togetherness, tackling inequality, mitigating the effects of climate change, enhancing food security and ensuring post-Covid-19 safety.