

Guidelines for Employer Broker Activities

1. Overview

1.1. Introduction

Employer Brokers is a competitive grants program which is a component of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEEWR) Employment Services, commencing on 1 July 2009 and ending on 30 June 2012. Employer Brokers will ensure that Employment Services have a strong focus on matching the needs of job seekers with the labour requirements of employers. The Australian Government has provided \$6 million over three years to fund Employer Broker activities - \$2 million in each of 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12.

1.2. The Employer Broker Panel

In order to receive funding for the Employer Broker activities, organisations must be a member of the Employer Broker panel. Employer Broker panel membership is open to a wide range of organisations. Initial selection of panel members was conducted through the Request for Tender for Employment Services 2009-12 process. Successful panel members will be announced in early 2009. Further opportunities for inclusion on the Panel may be made available over the life of the Employer Broker funding.

These guidelines provide information for members of the Employer Broker panel (and other persons or organisations who may wish to nominate ideas) on the development of proposals to deliver Employer Broker activities.

2. The Objective of Employer Broker Activities

The objective of the Employer Broker role is to engage with employers in a skill or labour shortage industry, or a specific location, to broker solutions that meet employers' needs and to co-ordinate and target the efforts of Employment Services Providers to matching the needs of job seekers with the labour requirements of employers.

Employer Broker activities will focus on industries experiencing skill or labour shortage, and disadvantaged locations, and will complement other Australian Government initiatives in these areas. Published information on labour supply, skill shortages and employer demand are available from a number of sources including the Labour Market Information Portal (www.workplace.gov.au/lmip), the SkillsInfo website (www.skillsinfo.gov.au), ABS resources and published employer surveys.

Employer Brokers are expected to have strong links to the employer community in a particular industry or region. They will be well placed to co-ordinate and target the efforts of Employment Services Providers to meet the needs of individual employers and secure employment outcomes for job seekers. Potential roles for Employer Brokers include:

- improving linkages between job seekers, Employment Services Providers, providers of other employment services (including Disability Employment Network, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Indigenous Employment Program), employers, training organisations and other stakeholders
- working with training organisations, employers and Employment Services Providers to develop career pathways that will assist employers to attract and retain an appropriately skilled work force

- linking disadvantaged job seekers with appropriate training and other assistance to meet the needs of employers, and
- assist individual employers or groups of employers in the retention of staff.

3. Proposals for Employer Broker Activities

3.1. Scope

Employer Broker activities should focus on assisting employers to meet labour and skill needs while also improving employment outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers.

As well as meeting the objective of Employer Broker activities, proposals must:

- identify an industry or location specific need for appropriately skilled staff
- target jobseekers who are eligible for assistance through Employment Services
- involve appropriate linkages and partnerships between employers and relevant stakeholders, for example Employment Services Providers, providers of other services (including Disability Employment Network, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Indigenous Employment Program), training organisations and local industry bodies
- identify any support and/or funding the organisation will provide to supplement Commonwealth funding
- not require ongoing funding and be sustainable at the completion of the activity without further DEEWR funding
- identify the expected outcomes from the proposal, including clear employment targets, and
- include a best practice dissemination and evaluation plan to share the results of the activity with relevant stakeholders including other Employer Broker panel members and Employment Services Providers. DEEWR may also undertake an independent evaluation of the activity.

Preference will be given to activity proposals which:

- involve appropriate partnerships with Employment Services Providers, employers and other relevant stakeholders
- assist a greater number of job seekers and have a greater likelihood of achieving outcomes for these job seekers
- include contribution of funds or in kind contributions from the proponent or other organisations to supplement the amount sought in their proposal, and
- have the potential to be applied on a longer term scale after the conclusion of the project, particularly if there are possible applications in future employment services.

In order to maximise the available funds, individual activities will generally not be funded for more than \$100,000 from Employer Brokers per year. There is no fixed length for activities, however they must be completed by 30 June 2012. Panel members may be selected to implement more than one activity simultaneously.

3.2. Developing Proposals for Employer Broker Activities

Initial Employer Broker activities will commence on 1 July 2009. For these initial activities, DEEWR will seek specifically targeted submissions for specific skill or labour shortage industry and/or locations.

After 1 July 2009, DEEWR may have formal processes for seeking general expressions of interest for activities or alternatively, DEEWR may seek submissions for particular activities or from specific groups within the panel. The process for developing proposals will operate flexibly and can include the following:

- proposals could be submitted by panel members on an ad hoc basis
- DEEWR could work in partnership with panel members to develop proposals
- DEEWR may seek submissions for particular activities from all or specific panel members depending on the activity requirements and the panel members' knowledge, experience and capability to undertake those activities
- non-panel members for example, Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments may nominate ideas for activities directly to DEEWR or to a panel member and if determined to be suitable by DEEWR, panel members may be sought to develop and implement these activities, and
- non-panel members may directly approach panel members to collaborate on activity proposals which the panel member would then submit to DEEWR.

4. Submitting Activity Proposals

4.1. Process for Submitting Proposals

To submit an activity proposal for consideration by DEEWR, panel members must submit a Proposal for Funding form (see Attachment A). This form requires a number of details including details of the activity, a project plan and a proposed budget for the activity.

Proposals must be lodged by submitting the Proposal for Funding form (Attachment A) and any attachments to DEEWR. Electronic copies are preferred, accompanied by one complete hard copy with a signed Legal Authorisation Form which is included in Part A of the Proposal for Funding Form. Receipt of proposals will be acknowledged. DEEWR reserves the right to contact the applicant and seek further information about the proposal and to undertake consultations with other relevant parties regarding the proposal.

4.2. Timeframe for Submitting Proposals

Initial Employer Broker activities will commence on 1 July 2009. DEEWR will seek submissions for targeted activities in April 2009. Where DEEWR formally seeks any subsequent activity proposal submissions, panel members will be advised separately of the appropriate timeframes. In addition, from 1 July 2009, panel members may submit activity proposals at any time.

5. Conditions of Proposal Lodgement

5.1. Confidential Information

Proponents must identify any information contained within their activity proposal which they consider should be treated as confidential and provide reasons for the request. DEEWR reserves the right to accept or refuse a request to treat information as confidential.

5.2. Conflict of Interest

Where a proponent identifies that a conflict of interest exists or might arise in relation to Employer Broker activities, the proponent must identify the actual, apparent or potential conflict of interest and inform DEEWR immediately.

A conflict of interest may exist, for example, if the proponent, or any of its personnel:

- has a relationship (whether professional, commercial or personal) with a party who is able to influence the Employer Broker assessment process, such as a DEEWR staff member, or

- has a relationship with, or an interest in, an organisation which is likely to interfere with or restrict the proponent in carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently.

Each proponent will be required to declare in the Legal Authorisation section of the Proposal for Funding form that to the best of its knowledge there is no conflict of interest that would prevent the proponent from proceeding with the Activity or any funding agreement it may enter into with the Australian Government.

5.3. Further Contact

DEEWR may contact the proponent or referees to seek further clarification or negotiate modifications to the proposal's scope or budget.

6. Assessment of Activity Proposals

6.1. Probity

DEEWR is committed to ensuring that the process for funding activities under Employer Brokers is fair and in accordance with published Guidelines, as may be varied by DEEWR from time to time.

6.2. No Undertaking

Proponents should be aware that there is no guarantee of funding for any of their proposals, even where DEEWR has approached the applicant to submit an activity proposal or to develop or consider delivering an activity proposal. No payments will be made by DEEWR for the development of any proposals or for any other work by panel members in respect of their appointment to the panel, other than any funding that DEEWR may agree to for the delivery of an activity.

6.3. Evaluation of Proposals

All proposals will be assessed against the criteria detailed below by DEEWR staff with appropriate expertise and knowledge. Where relevant, advice may also be sought from other Commonwealth agencies and other relevant agencies or expert bodies. As Employer Brokers is a competitive grants program, each proposal will be assessed on its merits, and in comparison to other activity proposals submitted at the same time or previously. These guidelines set out the basis on which activity proposals will be assessed.

Based on these guidelines, the Minister for Employment Participation or his delegate is responsible for approving all Employer Broker activities based on the recommendations of DEEWR.

6.4. Assessment Criteria

Proponents must address all of the assessment criteria detailed below in Part B of the Proposal for Funding form (Attachment A). There are a series of service specific sub-criteria under each of the assessment criteria. Information which should be provided in the response to each of these sub-criteria is also detailed below.

Proponents should limit their response to assessment criteria in section 5 of the Proposal for Funding form to a maximum of three A4 pages addressing all criteria (i.e. responses should not be three pages per criterion). This limit includes text, diagrams, graphs or pictures. Text should be typed and no smaller than 11 point font (except for tables which should be no smaller than 10 point font). This page limit does not apply to information provided in response to other sections of the Proposal for Funding form.

Assessment of Employer Broker activities will be based on your responses to the following questions:

Criterion 1

Weighting = 50%

Provide a business case for your proposal which demonstrates how you will meet the objectives of the Employer Brokers program (as described in Section 2 of these guidelines). As part of your response you must prepare a summary and project plan for your proposed activity.

1.1 Provide a summary of the proposed activity.

Your response should include the following:

- a summary of the proposed activity, including what the project will achieve and how it will be determined to be a success
- details of the industry and/or location where the activity will be undertaken and why this industry/location needs the project
- describe how your proposal will meet the objectives of the Employer Brokers program, and
- details of your management practices, including:
 - governance arrangements for the activity (e.g. details of any management or steering committees)
 - how the activity will be implemented in a cost effective manner that provides value for money
 - any risks associated with the activity and how your organisation will manage those risks including through quality assurance planning, and
 - details of appropriate subject matter expertise of key staff.

1.2 Use the template in Item 6, Part B of the Proposal for Funding form to develop a Project Plan which outlines the following:

- the proposed timeline
- all activities and milestones by which the progress of the activity can be measured
- performance indicators and progress measures, and
- all expected outcomes.

1.3 Prepare a budget for the activity and identify assets required to be purchased

Your response should include the following:

- use the table in the Item 7, Part B of the Proposal for Funding form to outline the business relations relevant to the activity and indicate the nature of the support, including relevant references
- using the table in Item 8, Part B of the Proposal for Funding form, outline details of any direct or indirect contributions you or other sources will make to the activity. Preference will be given to activity proposals which include contribution of funds or in kind contributions from your own or other organisations to supplement the amount sought in your activity proposal, and
- use the template in Item 9, Part B of the Proposal for Funding form to prepare a Budget for the activity, providing a breakdown of income and expenditure by item.

Criterion 2

Weighting = 30%

Detail your capacity and strategies for working collaboratively with relevant stakeholders (such as Employment Services Providers, employers, training organisations and local community or industry bodies) to undertake this activity.

2.1 Describe how you intend to work with employers, training providers and other stakeholders to undertake this activity.

Your response should include the following:

- how you will engage with employers and other relevant stakeholders in a skills or labour shortage industry, or a specific location, to broker solutions that meet employers' needs
- details of any stakeholders that you have consulted with whilst developing the activity proposal, and
- the details of partnerships and collaborations that have been negotiated with other organisations involved in the activity.

Criterion 3

Weighting = 20%

Describe how you will evaluate the success of the activity and your sustainability strategy for the activity, including how successful elements of the project will continue after the funding period elapses.

3.1 Describe your strategies for ensuring the sustainability of the activity.

Your response should include the following:

- your strategies for the sustainability of the activity, including your strategy for ensuring that relationships between key partners, including Employment Services Providers will continue at the conclusion of the funded activity
- describe how the activity can be funded after project funding ceases, and
- an outline of how the activity results will be shared with key stakeholders including other Employer Broker panel members and Employment Services Providers for future activities or replicated in other locations, industries and/or for other disadvantaged groups of job seekers.

3.2 Describe how you will evaluate the activity.

Your response should include the following:

- details of how you will evaluate the activity, including how you will monitor and respond to progress along the way and how you will define and measure success (e.g. employment outcomes achieved as a result of the activity), and
- details of any data that will be collected to undertake the evaluation including any data from DEEWR information systems.

7. Conditions of Funding

7.1. Terms and Conditions

If DEEWR decides to provide funding to a panel member for an activity, and the panel member agrees to deliver the activity, DEEWR and the panel member will agree to the terms and conditions for the activity, which will be substantially the terms and conditions set out in Annexure D Employment Services Contract.

7.2. Funding

Funding is not available retrospectively. Proponents should not plan to begin any activities dependent on Employer Broker funding before receiving formal notification of the Minister's or his delegate's decision. DEEWR also reserves the right to negotiate with proponents or offer applicants less than the amount for which they have applied.

Funding will be based on the budget submitted in the proposal, including any GST applicable. The budget should provide a breakdown of income and expenditure by item and detail funding received from the Employer Broker fund as well as from other sources. The budget should also demonstrate that the expenditure items provide value for money and withstand public scrutiny.

Funding for the following items should not be included in the budget:

- activities where there are other sources of Government funding readily available or reimbursement of services/activities that are already funded through other sources of Government funding
- activities that breach occupational health and safety or public safety
- employer related costs arising from employing job seekers such as insurance or workers compensation, or
- cash incentives, inducements, gifts or rewards (except where offered for participation in project evaluation activities).

Payments will generally be based as follows:

- an upfront payment will be paid on commencement of the activity
- a milestone payment will be paid on completion of 6 months of the activity or at the mid-point of the activity, whichever falls earlier
- where the mid-point of the activity occurs after 6 months, additional milestone payments will be made in 6 monthly intervals, and
- a final payment will be paid on satisfactory completion of the activity and receipt of a satisfactory final report acquitting all funding received and appropriate invoices.

Generally, all payments will be of equal value. Where there is a strong business case for doing so, DEEWR may, at its discretion, agree to an alternative payment plan for an activity.

A milestone payment will be paid on satisfactory achievement of the project deliverables for that milestone period and receipt of a satisfactory milestone report detailing the achievement of the project's deliverables for that milestone period.

If it appears that the activity is not achieving its objectives, DEEWR may negotiate with the proponent to cease funding for the activity.

Proponents should have an Australian Business Number and be registered with the Australian Taxation Office for GST.

7.3. Reporting Requirements

Successful proponents will be required to submit a final report at the end of their Employer Broker activity, giving evidence that the activity was completed in the specified manner, an audited financial statement acquitting all funding received, a certificate and audited register of assets at the conclusion of the activity. In their final report, successful proponents will also be required to describe how they implemented their best practice dissemination and the results of their evaluation of the project. Successful results may be disseminated by DEEWR in order to share and develop best practice strategies.

Proponents must also show DEEWR any activity related information they intend to publish prior to publishing and should also ensure that they do not bring Employer Brokers program into disrepute.

7.4. Activities that are Unlikely to be Funded

The following activities are unlikely to be funded through the Employer Brokers:

- any proposals that are for portals/websites or solely promotional activities
- any proposals that are solely for the purchase of assets and equipment
- any proposal from employers where theirs is the sole organisation to benefit from activities
- any proposals that do not demonstrate strong linkages with and commitment from Employment Services Providers, other service providers, employers, industry or other stakeholders, and
- proposals where the proposal contravenes other requirements of the Australian Government.