

Guidelines for Innovation Fund Projects

1. Overview

1.1. Introduction

The Innovation Fund 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 2012¹. The Innovation Fund is a competitive grants program designed to address the needs of the most disadvantaged job seekers through funding projects that will foster innovative solutions to overcome barriers to employment which these job seekers face. The Australian Government has provided \$41 million over three years to fund Innovation Fund projects – approximately \$13.66 million in 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12.

1.2. The Innovation Fund Panel

In order to receive funding from the Innovation Fund, organisations must be a member of the Innovation Fund panel. 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 Innovation Fund.

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

2. The Objective of the Innovation Fund

The objective of the Innovation Fund is to fund innovative place-based solutions to address barriers to employment for groups of the most disadvantaged job seekers. These groups include, but are not limited to, people in areas with entrenched disadvantage, the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, people with mental health conditions, Indigenous Australians, and job seekers in jobless families.

The Innovation Fund seeks to develop solutions for disadvantaged job seekers that would ultimately lead to obtaining and sustaining employment. Successful projects will be promoted so that they can be replicated in other settings and other disadvantaged job seekers can benefit from the results.

Innovation Fund projects will help achieve the Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda by supporting innovative strategies that help disadvantaged job seekers find employment.

Information on the Government's social inclusion agenda can be found at www.socialinclusion.gov.au.

¹For the purposes of administering the Family Centred Employment Project **only**, these Guidelines will continue in force **until 30 June 2013**. This extended operation date does not impact upon or relate in any way to projects funded under the Government's \$41 million Innovation Fund for 2009-2012.

3. Proposals for Innovation Fund Projects

3.1. Scope

Proposals should be for projects that offer innovative solutions to address barriers to employment for groups of the most disadvantaged job seekers and complement the Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda.

A diverse range of innovative projects may be funded, including but not limited to:

- establishing wrap-around service solutions (e.g. health, mental health, drug and alcohol services, dentists, childcare providers, preschools and schools, language and cultural organisations, local government, business, housing and homelessness services)
- integrated services for disadvantaged job seekers including projects that improve information sharing between services that assist job seekers
- mentoring groups of job seekers with specific disadvantage
- establishing social enterprises, and
- projects to link disadvantaged job seekers with areas of skill shortage.

When developing proposals, proponents may wish to consider if the project:

- is innovative
- capitalises on existing infrastructure, including building on the reforms of the Employment Services Review
- has a community focus which takes into account community aspirations, culture and expectations
- links job seekers to services relevant to their individual circumstances and the community in which they reside.

As well as meeting the objective of the Innovation Fund, projects must:

- where the proponent is not an Employment Services Provider, there must be at least one Employment Services Provider involved to target jobseekers who are eligible for assistance through Employment Services
- preferably involve collaboration or partnerships with other stakeholders such as providers of services (including Disability Employment Network, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Community Development Employment Projects and the Indigenous Employment Program where relevant), training organisations, employers, research bodies, other levels of government, and community-based organisations
- show measurable employment outcomes for job seekers or show how outcomes are likely to lead to employment for job seekers in the future, and
- include a best practice dissemination and evaluation plan to share the results of the project with relevant stakeholders including other Innovation Fund panel members and Employment Services Providers. DEEWR may also undertake an independent evaluation of the project.

Preference may be given to project proposals which:

- involve appropriate and well negotiated partnerships with other service providers and relevant stakeholders needed to assist disadvantaged job seekers
- assist a greater number of disadvantaged job seekers and have a greater likelihood of achieving outcomes for these job seekers
- work with the local community in designing and running interventions
- include contribution of funds or in kind contributions from the proponent or other organisations to supplement the amount sought in their project 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.

Individual projects will generally not be funded for more than \$500,000 per year from the Innovation Fund, however, this will be considered on a case by case basis, depending on the scale of the project. There is no fixed length for projects, however they must be completed by 30 June 2012. Panel members may be selected to implement more than one project simultaneously.

3.2. Developing Project Proposals

Initial Innovation Fund Projects will commence on 1 July 2009. For these initial projects, DEEWR will seek specifically targeted submissions related to developing innovative solutions to address barriers to employment.

After 1 July 2009, DEEWR may have formal processes for seeking general expressions of interest for projects on any appropriate topic or alternatively, DEEWR may seek submissions for particular projects or from specific groups within the panel. The process for developing project 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 projects from all or specific panel members depending on the project requirements and the panel members' knowledge, experience and capability to undertake those projects
- non-panel members, for example, the Australian Social Inclusion Board or Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments, may nominate ideas for projects 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 projects, and
- non-panel members may directly approach panel members to collaborate on project proposals which the panel member would then submit to DEEWR.

4. Submitting Project Proposals

4.1. Process for Submitting Proposals

To submit a project 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 project, a project plan and a proposed budget for the project.

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 Innovation Fund Projects will commence on 1 July 2009. DEEWR will seek submissions for targeted projects in April 2009. Where DEEWR formally seeks any subsequent project proposal submissions, panel members will be advised separately of the appropriate timeframes. In addition, from 1 July 2009, panel members may submit project proposals at any time.

5. Conditions of Proposal Lodgement

5.1. Confidential information

Proponents must identify any information contained within their project 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 Innovation Fund projects, 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 Innovation Fund project 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 project or any funding agreement it may enter into with the Australian Government.

5.3. Further Contact

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

6. Assessment of Project Proposals

6.1. Probity

DEEWR is committed to ensuring that the process for funding projects under the Innovation Fund is fair and in accordance with published guidelines, as may be varied by DEEWR from time to time.

6.2. No Undertaking

Project proponents should be aware that there is no guarantee of funding for any of their proposals, even where DEEWR has approached the panel member to submit a project proposal, or to develop or consider delivering a project 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 a project.

6.3. Evaluation of Proposals

All proposals will be assessed against the criteria detailed below by a project assessment team with appropriate expertise and knowledge. The project assessment team will comprise of DEEWR staff and external members (which may include members from the Departments of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Finance and Deregulation and Families, Housing, Community Services and

Indigenous Affairs). Where relevant, advice may also be sought from other Commonwealth agencies and other relevant agencies or expert bodies. As the Innovation Fund is a competitive grants program, each proposal will be assessed on its merits, and in comparison to other project proposals submitted at the same time or previously. These guidelines set out the basis on which project proposals will be assessed.

Based on these guidelines, the Minister for Employment Participation or his delegate is responsible for approving all Innovation Fund projects based on the recommendations of DEEWR.

6.4. Assessment Criteria

Organisations must address all of the assessment criteria detailed below in Part B of the Proposal for Funding form (Attachment A2). 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 four A4 pages when addressing all criteria (i.e. responses should not be four pages per criterion). This limit includes text, diagrams, graphs or pictures. Text should be typed and no smaller than 11 point Times New Roman 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 Innovation Fund projects will be based on your responses to the following questions:

Criterion 1

Weighting = 40%

Provide a business case for your project which demonstrates how you will assist disadvantaged job seekers. Your response should also demonstrate your understanding of the objective of the Innovation Fund (as described in section 2 of these guidelines).

1.1 Provide a summary of the project

Your response should include the following:

- a summary of the project, including the objectives of the project, details of how the project will be innovative, what the project will achieve and how it will be determined to be a success
- specify which target group or groups of disadvantaged job seekers this project will assist, and
- indicate where the project will be undertaken (i.e. location) and why this location was chosen.

1.2 Provide details of how your project will meet the objectives of the Innovation Fund

Your response should include the following:

- describe how your project will address the needs of disadvantaged job seekers by fostering innovative solutions to overcome barriers to employment. This may include education, training or other suitable interventions such as health, housing or other support. This should include the likely numbers of job seekers the project will help and the types of outcomes the project will achieve for these job seekers (e.g. jobs, training, education), and
- describe how the project will fit within the priorities of the Australian Government's Social Inclusion Agenda.

Criterion 2

Weighting = 25%

Describe your capacity to work/collaborate/partner with relevant key stakeholders, including Employment Services Providers and others who service the geographic area where the project is based and the Employment Services Providers connected to the job seekers being assisted by the project. If your organisation is not an Employment Services Provider, you will be required to partner with one or more Employment Services Providers in delivering your proposed project. Your response should also demonstrate your capacity to draw on resources and expertise from the community, business and government and/or research sectors.

2.1 Provide details of any community, employer or industry involvement

Your response should include the following:

- details of any stakeholders that you have consulted with when developing the proposal
- a description of the strategies that you will put in place to work in partnership with these other organisations, including, for example, Employment Services Providers, community organisations, employers and government agencies, and
- where your organisation is not an Employment Services Provider, details of which Employment Services Providers you will work with in delivering the proposed project.

2.2 Detail any demonstrated commitment from your organisation or other partners in the project

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 project and indicate the nature of the support and include any relevant referees, and
- provide details of any direct or indirect contributions you or other sources will make to the project using the table in Item 8, Part B of the Proposal for Funding form. Preference will be given to project proposals which include contribution of funds or in kind contributions from your own or other organisations to supplement the amount sought in your project proposal.

Criterion 3

Weighting = 20%

Describe how your proposed project will achieve outcomes that are cost effective and value for money, including how this will be measured. Also detail your management practices to deliver successful project results.

3.1 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 project can be measured
- performance indicators and progress measures, and
- all expected outcomes.

You may also provide any additional information including any proposed progress reports.

3.2 Prepare a budget for the project and identify assets required to be purchased

Your response should use the template in Item 9, Part B of the Proposal for Funding Form to prepare a budget for the project, providing a breakdown of income and expenditure by item. Provide details of any planned purchase of assets using Innovation Fund Project funds. Identify any other equipment that is required for the project and how that will be acquired.

3.3 Detail your management practices

Your response should include the following:

- details of your organisation's governance arrangements in relation to overseeing the proposed project (e.g. details of any management or steering committees)
- details of how your project will be implemented in a cost effective manner that will provide value for money
- details of any risks associated with the project and how your organisation will manage those risks including through quality assurance planning, and
- details of your organisation's staff that have any appropriate subject matter expertise which will assist in delivering the proposed project.

Criterion 4

Weighting = 15%

Describe how you will evaluate the success of the project and your sustainability strategy for the project, including how successful elements of the project will continue after the funding period elapses. Also describe how any successful results of the project can be used to model best practice behaviour.

4.1 You must provide a strategy to evaluate the success of the project

Your response should include the following:

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

4.2 You must provide a sustainability strategy for the project

Your response should include the following:

- details of how successful elements of the project could continue after the funding period has elapsed
- an explanation in your strategy for ensuring that relationships between key partners, including Employment Services Providers will continue after the end of the project, and
- describe how the project can be funded after project funding ceases.

4.3 You must provide a best practice/lessons learned strategy for the project

Your response should include the following:

- an outline of how the project results can be shared with key stakeholders including other Innovation Fund panel members and Employment Services Providers for future projects or replicated in other locations and/or for other disadvantaged groups of job seekers, and
- details of your strategy to showcase any successful results of the project more widely, including how you will manage competing commercial interests when disseminating results.

7. Conditions of Funding

7.1. Terms and Conditions

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

7.2. Funding

Funding is not available retrospectively. Proponents should not plan to begin project activities dependent on Innovation Fund funding before receiving formal notification of the Minister or his delegate's decision. DEEWR also reserves the right to negotiate with proponents or offer 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 must provide a breakdown of income and expenditure by item and detail funding received from the Innovation 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:

- projects 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 project
- a milestone payment will be paid on completion of 6 months of the project or at the mid-point of the project, whichever falls earlier
- where the mid-point of the project 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 project 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 a project.

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 project is not achieving its objectives, DEEWR may negotiate with the proponent to cease funding for the project.

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 Innovation Fund project, giving evidence that the project was completed in the specified manner, an audited financial statement acquitting all funding received, and a certificate and audited register of assets at the conclusion of the project. 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 project related information they intend to publish prior to publishing and should also ensure that they do not bring the Innovation Fund program into disrepute.

7.4. Projects that are Unlikely to be Funded

The following projects are unlikely to be funded through the Innovation Fund:

- any proposals that are for portals/websites or solely promotional activities
- any proposals that are solely for the purchase of assets and equipment
- any proposals from employers where theirs is the sole organisation to benefit from project 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.