

Connections to Opportunities **Application Guidance Note and Criteria**

Introduction

This note provides guidance and the criteria for the 'Connections to Opportunities' funding. These notes should guide the development of proposals prior to the completion of the standard Advantage West Midlands (AWM) Full Application Form, and in conjunction with the guidance in the application pack¹.

This initiative has been developed by Advantage West Midlands, to make a contribution to addressing the issue of economic exclusion and to meeting the challenge of the West Midlands output gap. The intention is, via Local Strategic Partnerships and their local partners, to assist long term unemployed or workless people on the path to employment. It is envisaged as a region wide approach that is focussed on innovative, bottom up activities addressing the issue, avoiding duplication with existing provision, whilst dovetailing with local circumstances.

Needs and/or Opportunities

AWM has established the need for this initiative. It is however essential that the Full Application articulates the needs or demand associated with:

- The geographical area;
- Any specific target groups that have been identified as being a priority; and
- The type of activity proposed.

Aims and Objectives

The funding is focused on meeting the challenge of moving people who are workless through to employment. It is essential that the Full Application demonstrates how your proposals will facilitate this aim.

In addition the Full Application will need to demonstrate how it meets the objectives of:

- To integrate with and add to existing provision
- To work with the 14 upper tier LSPs to support local initiatives to tackle worklessness
- To support innovative approaches to tackling worklessness by supporting third sector, local and community groups
- To reduce economic exclusion of individuals in key target groups within the region by helping them towards employment
- To identify critical success and failure factors in the activities funded, analysing the approaches undertaken seeking replicable approaches for future interventions

¹ see <http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/working-with-us/developing-your-project/project-development-pack.aspx>

Strategic Fit

The Full Application must address the strategic fit of the proposal within the targeted area or client group. Specifically it should explain how the proposal supports:

- The overall aims of the Local Strategic Partnership
- The Local Area Agreement and how the Full Application will contribute to meeting the LAA and the associated targets / NI's
- Locally specific strategies and plans for tackling worklessness
- Efforts of the Local Authority(ies)

And links to but does not duplicate;

- The efforts and structures of the Job Centre Plus and the LSC in tackling worklessness and how these organisations will be tied into the overall Governance structures relating to the Full Application.

In addition the Full Application should articulate if and where it links to other regional or sub-regional initiatives.

Implementation

Within the context highlighted above, the Full Application must demonstrate how the Applicant, under the auspices of the LSP will actually identify, assess and fund/support the local Initiatives, community and third sector organisations to address the issue of worklessness. See Appendix 1 for further information and timetable.

Partners and Partnership

It is anticipated that the lead partner will be the Local Authority, under the auspices of the Local Strategic Partnership, but if there is a local reason why this is not appropriate and a viable alternative is suggested, then this will be acceptable to the Agency, subject to the usual checks and balances.

The role and engagement of the LSP will be key to making the full proposal compliant with the funding criteria, as will the ability of the applicant to express clearly how this bid fits into the local context, frameworks and wider partners work, such as the JCP and LSC activity.

Target Beneficiaries

The principal foci of the overall programme is on:

- Long term workless
- Disabled people and those with health conditions
- Lone parents
- Ethnic minorities
- Older people (over 50) who are suffering from economic exclusion
- People with low or no qualifications

However, if local circumstance can evidence and justify focus on other groups or a different targeting approach this will be assessed on its merits.

Geographical Area

The Agency has taken account of the geographical concentration of worklessness in the region in terms of the specific allocations within the programme for each LSP area. However some applicants may wish to focus down further to allow for increased impact. This is entirely up to the LSP and the applicant but any further targeting must be able to demonstrate both need and demand.

Value

The Agency has a finite amount of grant money allocated to this programme and to ensure both transparency and equanimity the available funding has been allocated to each upper tier LSP area based on incidence of worklessness utilising the Regional Observatory data and the Department for Work and Pension definitions of Worklessness. This is the current maximum amount of grant available and the Full Application, in line with the 'letter of intent', should indicate whether there is sufficient demand or appetite to utilise this indicative allocation.

Impact

Within the context of this programme the Full Application will need to articulate the anticipated outputs and impact. There will be a value for money assessment undertaken by the Agency. While the Agency understands that unit costs will be high in proposals of this nature there will still be a sense check undertaken for the proposals.

The Agency is required to report to government on the outputs achieved by funding (the 'Tasking Framework'). The core output for the funding is '*Employment Support – Number of people assisted to get a job*'². Applicants will, therefore, have to provide a forecast of this in their submissions and subsequently monitor on implementation. Applicants may wish to identify other additional outputs.

In addition, we will require participants to be tracked on their progress towards employment, to enable figures to be produced on the number of people assisted actually gaining employment (i.e. the outcome). We will also work with LSPs and partners to establish intermediate milestones and measures.

Applicants will also be required to contribute to the sharing and dissemination of learning and good practice from the projects supported by the funding.

Overall the Agency sees the key impacts for the funding as:

- Individuals moving towards employment and off benefits;
- Alternative thinking on tackling worklessness emerging for policy makers and programme delivery in the region and beyond; and
- A better resourced and effective third sector (local and community groups) tackling worklessness in the region

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² http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/Images/Tasking-output-definitions_tcm9-6373.doc

Project Development and Implementation

The initiative is designed to provide revenue support for those intermediary organisations that work with people who are economically excluded in the region by dint of being workless. It will seek to achieve this by working through the upper tier LSP and dovetailing with the local management arrangements for tackling worklessness, to ensure complementarity and avoidance of duplication.

The time table for submissions is:

- Indication of intentions (letter) shared with AWM – by 6th March
- Full AWM application forms submitted to AWM for appraisal against programme criteria and AWM standard appraisals – end of May
- Appraisals, approval and contracts – June/July
- Begin delivery – July onwards

The diagram below represents how the Agency foresees implementation of the initiative (i.e. the grant / expenditure flow and the feedback and dissemination flow).

