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Flexible employment models

Working in the community sector demands a high level of skills in an industry characterised by short term or insecure funding. Employers – usually management committees – need to design the jobs to manage short term projects effectively.

There are number of models which can provide:

- Recognition and rewards for the worker

- Career development for the worker

- A pleasant working environment in the organisation and its community

- Development of skills in the employing organisation and in the sector generally.

Some flexible employment models include:

- Part time positions

- Job share positions

- Secondments

- Consultants

Flexible employment models also respond to demographic changes so that students, parents, carers, and older workers can balance paid work with other responsibilities.

Other innovative arrangements include employment policies with flexible working hours or arrangements for working from home.

Sharing the 'back office' functions can benefit the administration of small community organisations.

Part time positions

Dividing a project into part time positions may be useful to recruit staff with specialised skills or experience. In projects with short term funding, the employment contract – a fixed term contract – should specify the end date of employment. Part-time employees receive all the entitlements of full time employees on a proportional basis.

An example is a community based research project where the part time researcher works with a team in a youth centre.

Job share positions

Job sharing is a form of part-time employment where more than one employee shares all the duties and responsibilities of one position. Job-sharers perform the same tasks or the project is divided between the workers who have the core skills and specialised skills. The organisation benefits from having a wider range of skills, experience or specialisation in the one job.

In designing the job share arrangements, include a plan of action if one of the workers leaves the job - to advertise the job share position, or offer the remaining worker the whole position. The employment contracts should include details of the job description, communication and coordination, supervision, performance appraisal and work reports. Job share employees receive all the entitlements of full time employees on a proportional basis.

Where two workers with different job descriptions work independently, it is better to divide the position into two part time jobs.

If the funding is short term, the job share employee has a fixed term work contract with a specific end date of employment.

An example of a job shared community project is a conference project where one part time worker does the developmental work and the other does administrative work.

Casual positions

A casual employee is someone engaged to perform work of a short-term and/or irregular nature, usually paid for a minimum of two hours. They are covered by an award, paid casual rates and do not have written contracts.

An example of a casual position is someone who employed to do a backlog of work, or to complete part of a position left vacant.

Secondments

A secondment is an arrangement where an employee is 'lent' to another agency for a short term project but remains the employee of their home agency. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the home and host employer details their responsibilities for matters such as leave entitlements. The seconded employee has a short term employment contract.

Secondments benefit both agencies in exchanging expertise and experience, and in understanding workplace culture.

An example of a secondment is someone who works in a human services government department who wants experience of work in the community sector – or vice versa.

Part time positions, job-sharing positions, casual work and secondments are worked under an award or enterprise agreement.

Consultants

To engage a worker with specialist skills, a position can be designed for a consultant who must have an Australian Business Number (an A.B.N.). The consultant is paid an agreed consultancy fee according to their invoice. (So a consultant is not paid a salary; the employer does not have responsibility for on-costs such as leave, workers compensation insurance or superannuation contributions.)

Develop a project brief and invite consultants to submit an expression of interest. Recruit the consultant in an interview process similar to other employees.

When you have selected the consultant, enter into a written contract with: the terms of reference of the project; the consultant's fee and how it is to be paid; a timeline that includes specific tasks, when project reviews will be held, and the expected date of completion; reasons for amendment or termination of the project; copyright, title, ownership of material and intellectual property rights; confidentiality agreements; and professional liability.

(Source: NCOSS Selecting a consultant: Information Sheet 9)

An example of a consultant is some one engaged to run focus groups or specialised training.

Contractor

A contractor – such as an IT service worker – performs a specific, set job under direction at an agreed time. They give a quote and are paid according to the invoice. For more information see the NSW Office of Fair Trading www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au

Flexible working hours

A work contract can include flexible working hours to allow employees to work an agreed number of hours spread over a set period of time. For example, the worker is employed for an average of 8 hours a week in a 12 week project.

The worker may work 4 hours a week for 4 weeks and then 10 hours a week for 8 weeks and be paid in the pay period in which the hours fall.

These arrangements allow the organisation to develop and manage the project effectively.

Working from home

Home-based work arrangements enable employees to spend part, or all of their working time at home keeping in contact with the workplace by telephone and email. The arrangements should be set out in the organisation's policies and procedures.

Models for bookkeepers and administrative workers

The NCOSS publication 'Sharing Financial Administration' explores some models for small community organisations. One model is to outsource payroll or bookkeeping to an off-site service provider or a larger community organisation. Another model is sharing a bookkeeper or administrative worker with another community organisation – where the worker has two part time positions. A group of small organisations who provide similar services in region may form a consortium, co-locate, and employ staff (receptionist, administrative worker, bookkeeper) who are paid according to how many hours they work for each consortium member.

Resources

Illawarra Forum

Community templates, including Fin 5, a sample employment contract.
www.illawarraforum.org.au

NCOSS

Selecting a consultant: Information Sheet 9

Recruitment: Good Practice Information Sheet 15

Sharing Financial Administration, a feasibility study of potential models for small non-government organisations. 2007

Sample Policy and Procedures Manual for Management & Governance 2005
www.ncoss.org.au

NSW Office of Industrial Relations

www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au

www.workandfamily.nsw.gov.au/

Publication: Introducing workplace flexibility

Australian Workplace

Agreements, awards and contracts

www.workplace.gov.au