

9 September 2024

Brett Whitworth
Deputy Secretary, Local Government
Office of Local Government
Locked Bag 3015
Nowra NSW 2541

Dear Mr Whitworth,

Re: Council Apprentice, Trainee and Cadet Program Funding Guidelines Round 1

Local Government Regional Joint Organisations (JOs) were proclaimed in May 2018 under the NSW Local Government Act 1993. The Central NSW Joint Organisation (CNSWJO) represents over 177,000 people covering an area of more than 51,000sq kms comprising the Local Government Areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Lithgow, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Weddin, Central Tablelands Water, and Upper Macquarie County Council.

Tasked with intergovernmental cooperation, leadership and prioritisation, JOs have consulted with their stakeholders to identify key strategic regional priorities. The CNSWJO Strategic Plan can be found on the CNSWJO website www.centraljo.nsw.gov.au or directly via this link:

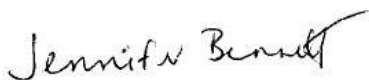
www.centraljo.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/051222_CNSWJO-Strategic-Plan-October-2023-Final.pdf

The CNSWJO's submission to the Office of Local Government in relation to Council Apprentice, Trainee and Cadet Program Funding Guidelines Round 1 strongly supports the submission provided by the Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC). Please see attached.

This region has a long history of supporting member councils will skill shortages, most notably in water and wastewater treatment. Through this period, we have identified three critical issues for trainees and apprentices; retention of trainees to completion, the navigability of the training frameworks, and the lack of support and coordination of the trainee cohorts. We are of a view that an investment in addressing these issues regionally will optimise this funding program as described by the OLG in the Guidelines.

Please contact me on 0428 690 935 if you would like to discuss any of the above any further.

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Bennett
Executive Officer
Central NSW Joint Organisation

COMMENTS

COUNCIL APPRENTICE, TRAINEE AND CADET PROGRAM FUNDING GUIDELINES – ROUND ONE

As requested at the consultation, I have not shared the Guidelines with our Member Councils. However, these comments are based on REROC's substantial and successful experience in the area of workforce development through a wide variety of skills shortage programs we have run since 2006 many of which are aimed at young people. I believe my comments are a reflection of where the REROC Member Councils would stand.

We note with some concern that there appears to be no funding allocated to promote the benefits of a career in Local Government. Based on our experience there is not an untapped well of young people just waiting to be offered an apprenticeship or traineeship, at least not in the Riverina Region.

Just because a council offers a position this does not mean there will be applicants for the position. We have found in our work with young people (and their parents) that the level of understanding about the opportunities that Local Government provides from a career perspective is woefully short. Indeed, there is little understanding of the breadth, depth and diversity of employment in Local Government.

We strongly recommend that that funding be set aside for the promotion of careers in Local Government to be undertaken at a local level. We are recommending that the promotions be designed and delivered at a local level because it can be tailored to meet local needs. For instance, REROC has found with other community education programs it runs that cinema advertising works well, as do council newsletters and spots on ABC Riverina radio. In addition, because of our existing skills' programs REROC is well known in local schools a situation that we can leverage to promote positions. This may not be the case in other regions.

REROC would strongly support funding being made available, preferably at a regional level to the JO/ROC network to promote careers in local government and apprenticeship, traineeship and cadetships.

In addition, we believe that the Program could be enhanced with funding to provide co-ordinated regional activities that could support and enhance the apprenticeship and

traineeship experience by bringing together participants and their mentors/supervisors on a regular basis to network, learn and capacity build. Again this funding could be directed at the JO/ROC network who are well-positioned and experienced in the provision of these types of activities.

We provided the following comments on the Guidelines against its headings.

1. Objectives

We believe the objectives of the Program should include raising awareness and promoting the benefits of careers in local government

What is being funded

On_costs – the OLG knows that on-costs for local government staff are much higher than 15%. I cannot understand why the Program would not fund the full cost of employment.

New.roles – there could be an adverse outcome whereby council stop advertising positions or creating positions while waiting for the OLG to finalise the Program. We would suggest that the requirements should be extended to include new positions created in the last 6 months.

We would also like to ensure that councils who have committed to apprenticeships over many years are not disadvantaged because those roles are already in current workforce numbers. For example, if a council has a system in place where once an apprentice reaches say 3rd year then a new apprentice is employed – is this a new role or the replacement of an existing role?

Funding.assigned.to.the.Individual.not.the.Position – if the employee moves to a similar position in another councils does the funding travel with them or is it lost? We believe that it should travel with the employee to ensure the employee is not lost to the sector.

In addition, if the employee does not work out and the employee goes within say the first 3 months then does the council have to wait to the next round of funding to try again. We think that it would be better if there was “grace period” whereby if the employee was not retained in the position for any reason within say 6 months council could advertise to re-fill the position, If the position is not re-filled then the funded is forfeited.

Costs.of.Training–Travel.not.an.Eligible.Costs – in regional areas apprentices in particular are required to travel to participate in block release education. They cannot attend TAFE or other educational institutions in their own towns. Block release not only requires travel but accommodation, it is a major disincentive for many employers to take on apprentices in country areas.

We believe that funding should be available to meet the costs associated with block release education arrangements.

2. Responding to Each Individual Council's Need

If there is sufficient funding for each council to have at least two positions in the first round, why make the first round competitive? It is well known that country councils who are not as well resourced as their metro counterparts often struggle to prepare funding applications. We are concerned that small councils may be disadvantaged by a competitive grant process.

Are councils going to have to wait until the funding is approved before they can advertise the position? Or if they advertise the position and fill it, and then do not get funding what is expected to happen?

3. Council Responsibilities

Quarterly Reporting – this is too onerous, it should be six-monthly in the first year and then annually after that, unless the employee resigns or is terminated in which case OLG should be advised within 2 weeks.

Invoicing - this appears to assume that courses will be completed on a quarterly basis. What is the plan if the RTO course structure does not provide for quarterly completion?

4. Application Criteria

Link to a Career™ Education Pathway - this is too onerous a criterion. This would require councils to guarantee that it would have a full-time job for a fully qualified tradesperson in four years' time.

Undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship by their very nature are career paths, council being able to offer a job on completion should not be a consideration

Addressing Challenges – given that the entire sector recognises the skills shortages that are currently being faced and the crisis that is on the horizon Does this criteria actually add anything to the assessment process?

Confirmation of new apprentice and trainee details - we are still unclear as to which comes first – the funding or the apprentice.

5. Program Duration

We believe that this should be a rolling program, to reflect the way that recruitment occurs. It is unclear whether the 1 January is a closing date for applications of an opening date.

The Guidelines state that the OLG is looking at 1:1 with apprentices and trainees however there appears to be no intake for trainees in 2026. This is not a sound approach. Councils should be able to offer apprenticeships and traineeships in every year. We also note there is no mention of cadetships.

Also, we note that School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBATs) do not appear to be included. Our Member Councils have found SBATs to be a great pipeline for apprentices and trainees. We believe that funding for SBATs should be included in the Program.

6. Application Process

We are concerned that councils will not receive final approval of the grant until after recruitment takes place. Once provisional approval is granted, final approval should be guaranteed once recruitment is successful.

If the funding is not guaranteed, then why would councils risk undertaking recruitment.

As stated above we believe that this should be a rolling application Program because recruitment of apprentices, trainees and cadets happen through out the year. We note that it is open September to October each year we assume that this is to obtain provisional approval. Given that there are 128 councils, and each could apply for more than two positions, can the OLG process these by December each enabling councils to advertise as early as possible to attract school leavers. Again, our experience is that these students are quickly offered positions and if Local Government is to be competitive then advertising needs to take place soon after school finishes.

7. Assessment Process

We note that there is to be a Panel that will undertake assessment and that they may need to consider limits on certain trades in certain geographic locations depending on training availability. We are concerned that this criterion could unduly disadvantage rural councils where training providers and training networks may not be readily available.

We note that there are some discussions that criteria for assessment would include the number of apprentices and trainees previously employed. If this was used, then it would clearly advantage councils with higher populations and higher population density who have more applicants and greater choice. These councils are also likely to have greater access to RTOs. We believe that this criterion should not be applied to the assessment process.

Conclusion

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the OLG for the opportunity provide feedback on the Draft Guidelines for this significant project. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further input into the Program as it progresses.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Briggs', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Julie Briggs
REROC CEO

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