

New Community Engagement Grants Program

5 January 2017

Millions of dollars in funding will be provided to community organisations to assist the most vulnerable workers in the community, following the selection of successful recipients under the Fair Work Ombudsman's Community Engagement Grants Program.

In its 2016-17 Budget, the Federal Government committed \$7.3 million over four years to fund the Community Engagement Grants Program.

The Program involves the Fair Work Ombudsman providing total funding of \$1.8 million a year for four years to not-for-profit community organisations to undertake a range of services, projects and programs of work to supplement the Agency's statutory functions.

Starting on 1 January 2017 and running for four years, the Community Engagement Grants Program will see the Fair Work Ombudsman partner with the following organisations:

- JobWatch
- Growcom
- NT Working Women's Centre
- Employment Law Centre WA
- SA Working Women's Centre
- Redfern Legal Centre

Applications from not-for-profit community organisations opened for the Program in 2016 and the Fair Work Ombudsman released Guidelines detailing the selection criteria and how relevant organisations could apply for funding under the Program.

There was a high degree of competition for funding, with the Fair Work Ombudsman receiving applications from 81 different organisations. The standard of applications was high, with strong responses to the selection criteria.

Proposals were assessed in a rigorous selection process, facilitated by the Fair Work Ombudsman and overseen by an independent auditor.

The funding available has been allocated to those proposals which, collectively and individually, best meet the objectives of the Community Engagement Grants Program.

The Community Engagement Grants Program funding has been allocated to organisations that deliver a strong mix of services to assist vulnerable workers in a range of geographical areas around Australia.

The largest allocation of funding was to JobWatch to provide general advice and assistance to the most vulnerable workers in Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland.

Growcom has been allocated funding to assist employers in the horticultural sector to comply with workplace laws, thereby improving the employment experiences of vulnerable workers in that sector – firstly in Queensland and then expanding into other states in later years.

Continuing with the theme of targeting the Fair Work Ombudsman's priority areas, the Redfern Legal Centre's funding will deliver advice and assistance for International Students – another group who are known to be vulnerable.

The Fair Work Ombudsman is also pleased to be working with the Employment Law Centre WA and the Working Women's Centres of Northern Territory and South Australia who have a demonstrated ability to help vulnerable workplace participants over many years.

The successful organisations offer good value for money, both individually and as a group, having impact across a range of vulnerable worker categories and sectors where non-compliance with workplace laws is high.

The Fair Work Ombudsman is responsible for ensuring compliance with Commonwealth workplace relations legislation by employees and employers through advice, education and, where necessary, enforcement.

It is a strategic priority of the Fair Work Ombudsman to assist vulnerable workplace participants and the Agency is increasing its community engagement services, particularly those directed at culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The Fair Work Ombudsman's experience illustrates that some members of the community are more likely to be vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace and less likely to understand and assert their workplace rights or obligations due to factors such as age, English language skills and cultural barriers.

Employers and employees who have any uncertainty or questions about their workplace rights and obligations are encouraged to visit the Fair Work Ombudsman website at www.fairwork.gov.au or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94 for advice.

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Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

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