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# **Evaluation of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project**

## **Draft Final Report**

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## Introduction

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The Flexible Learning Leaders Project is one of a broad sweep of projects designed to support the continuing adoption of flexible learning in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

The projects are collectively known as *Strategy 2000* and they are intended to support the *Framework for National Collaboration in Flexible Learning in Vocational Education and Training 2000-2004*. The Framework is a five-year strategic plan to help Australians and Australian industries make a rapid and successful transition to the Information Economy by adding value to the Australian VET system of flexible learning.

The documented vision guiding the Collaborative Framework is:

*By 2004, Australia will be recognised as the global leader in applying new technologies to vocational education and training products and services.*

The achievement of the vision is guided by seven principles and based on five key goals. While all seven principles of the Framework are relevant to the Flexible Learning Leaders Project, it is particularly guided by the following principles:

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Employee involvement:</b> | Collaborative Framework projects will maximise the involvement of VET staff at all levels to foster broad staff ownership of flexible learning practices. |
| <b>Accelerated take-up:</b>  | The Collaborative Framework will accelerate the application of flexible learning methodologies within the Australian VET system.                          |
| <b>Demand Driven:</b>        | Collaborative Framework projects will be driven by client demand, integrating current practices with new forms of delivery.                               |

The Flexible Learning Leaders project supports the achievement of the following Framework goal:

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Creative, capable people:</b> | To build a critical mass of VET staff who are able to use flexible learning approaches to accelerate Australia's transition to the information economy. |
|----------------------------------|---|

The Flexible Learning Leaders project, along with other key projects supporting the *creative, capable people* goal, seeks to:

- Stimulate and sponsor quality research and dissemination to increase understanding on the VET industry of pedagogical, technical and managerial aspects of flexible learning.
- Encourage VET institutions and systems to continuously improve the capabilities of their staff to provide flexible learning services and to use technologies to achieve business success.
- Develop international virtual communities of interest amongst VET staff in the field of flexible learning in VET.

## Outline of the FLL Project

The aim of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project is to develop a nation-wide group of vocational education and training (VET) practitioners able to lead Australian VET in flexible learning pedagogy as well as in the technical skills required to apply information technologies to flexible learning.

The project has provided an important opportunity to recognise and enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of a selected group of VET practitioners and thus increase the capability of their organisations to deliver and support flexible learning.

## **Purpose and Structure of the Report**

This final evaluation report provides summative information on the Flexible Learning Leaders Project. It reports on evaluation outcomes and makes recommendations in the following key areas:

- Project Planning and Initiation Processes
- National Project Management and Support
- Leaders' Project Management Approaches
- Communication and Collaboration Processes
- Leadership in Flexible Delivery

Finally the report outlines options for future directions.

# The Evaluation Project

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## Purpose of Evaluation

The evaluation project has sought to establish whether the Flexible Learning Leaders Project has achieved its aim and whether it has been administered effectively and efficiently. The evaluation project examined specific events in the life of the project including the induction workshop and the national workshop.

Within this broad framework, the evaluation project has achieved the following outcomes:

- Provision of formative and summative evaluation findings
- Provision of evaluation advice to national Project Managers:
  - Advice on the effectiveness of strategies and outcomes of specific project events
  - Advice on the success or otherwise of project management and support processes.

## Evaluation Approach

The Evaluation Project was a key component of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project.

The approach and associated methodology adopted by the Evaluation Team relied on the establishment and maintenance of strong collaborative links between all major stakeholders. Collaborative approaches also contributed to a team-based approach to continuous improvement of the project's processes and procedures.

In this context the Evaluation Team have:

- Liaised with the Project team throughout the project
- Assisted with the development of efficient methods for data collection from participants to avoid duplication of processes
- Provided feedback to the project team to achieve quality improvements throughout the project.

## Evaluation Strategies

A range of evaluation strategies were adopted by the Evaluation Team and information provided in this report is based on data collected in a variety of ways including:

- Observation of Workshops
- Informal and formal discussions with project participants, the national Project Managers and other key stakeholders
- Semi-structured telephone interviews (copies of interview proformas are provided in Appendix 1)
- Surveys/questionnaires of both successful and unsuccessful applicants for the Flexible Learning Leaders Project
- Analysis of policy documents, project briefs and other relevant documentation

Data analysis was based on the following approaches:

- Systematic documentation of data to ensure complementary analysis and reduce alternative interpretations
- Cross-project analysis allowing themes and patterns to emerge
- Key criteria and key questions to structure and guide analysis

- Tabulating and categorising evidence to facilitate the development of logical links between the data and explanation/generalisation
- Reflection – the Evaluation Team’s own insights and experiences.

## **Reporting**

- Two interim reports were provided to the national Project Managers during the project. The first report was provided shortly after the completion of project induction processes. It provided:
  - A summary of induction processes adopted by the national Project Managers
  - A summary analysis of participant responses to the project induction processes
  - An overview of emerging issues with the potential to impact either positively or negatively on the project
- The second report was more comprehensive and provided information to assist the national Project Managers with decision making and planning for future rounds of the project. It reported on the following key project areas:
  - Project initiation processes
  - National project management approaches
  - National workshop
  - Emerging issues
  - Future evaluation activities
- Other reporting mechanisms including email and teleconferencing complemented these formal reports.

## **Project Planning and Initiation Processes**

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This section of the report deals specifically with the processes adopted and implemented to initiate the Flexible Learning Leaders project.

### **Tendering and Selection**

#### **Overview of the Tendering Processes**

In April/May of 2000, comprehensive guidelines were prepared and disseminated nationally to inform VET individuals and organisations of the Flexible Learning Leaders Program. As well as providing an ample overview of the project, the guidelines provided comprehensive information on:

- Funding (including information on eligibility for funding; organisational contributions to the project; use of funds)
- Scope of the participants development program
- Support
- Leadership
- Reporting.

The guidelines also published selection criteria by which applications would be assessed.

Advertisements were placed in the 6-7 May and 13-14 May editions of the Weekend Australian. Applicants were advised that applications should be forwarded to reach the national Project Managers on or before Friday 26 May 2000.

Following an analysis of survey returns from both successful and unsuccessful applicants for the Flexible Learning Leaders project, the following broad conclusions can be drawn:

- Project guidelines and other tender documents were clear, concise and helpful.
- In preparing their submissions, the assistance provided to applicants from within their organisations was variable.
- Most leaders took between 8 and 16 person hours to prepare their submissions.
- Survey respondents expressed a strong preference for a two-step selection process to ensure more effective use of time and resources, to ensure final proposals are well developed, and to avoid the possibility of misunderstandings and confusion.
- Survey respondents reported satisfaction with the provision of feedback on tenders.

These findings are discussed in more detail below. A summary of findings is also provided in Appendix 3. The survey instrument is provided in Appendix 2.

#### **Dissemination of Tender Information**

Tender information was widely disseminated within the VET sector. Survey respondents indicated that information was readily and easily available to them.

The vast majority of proposers were made aware of the project by a colleague or an associate (71%). Only 18% of proposers became aware of the project through the newspaper advertisement.

The vast majority of proposers accessed tender information from the ANTA web site.

#### **Clarity of Tender Information**

In general terms, survey respondents reported that the information provided in the project guidelines and associated tender documents was presented clearly and concisely. The vast majority of

respondents indicated that the tender documentation was helpful or very helpful. Several respondents particularly noted the following points:

- Budget information was very helpful and clear - it eliminated any potential for confusion especially regarding contributions by individual organisations. Comments included: *Sample budgets were a god-send. Inclusion of sample budgets was a good idea.*
- Project guidelines and other tender documents were clear, concise and helpful – *The brief outlined clearly what the aims and objectives and requirements were.*
- Project proformas / templates were succinct and easy to use – *It was succinct and easy to use in comparison with other ANTA applications.*

Suggestions for improving tender documentation included:

- The provision of clearer and more precise information on the breadth of acceptable projects, including mini case studies or examples from the first round of leaders' projects
- The provision of further detail on proposed outcomes of the project – particularly expectations of individuals and organisations following the completion of the funded component of the project.
- Access to assistance from the national Project Managers during the tender period needs to be guaranteed – *While the tender documentation was clear, queries do arise and being able to access timely assistance is crucial especially when working to tight timeframes.*

#### **Recommendation 1**

*Tender documentation for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should build on the success of the 2000 project to ensure documentation:*

*Uses succinct language and provides consistent and relevant information*

*Outlines selection processes and responsibilities*

*Articulates selection criteria*

*Outlines roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders*

*Provides sample budget*

*Provides cases studies and examples of successful projects*

*Articulates expectations of tenderers and their proposals.*

#### **Selection processes**

While respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with the selection processes adopted by the project, many of them suggested areas for improvement. Most of these suggestions revolved around the amount of time available for preparation and lodgement of proposals. Survey respondents indicated that the preparation of the proposal generally took between 8 and 16 person hours to prepare. They indicated that while this was a manageable workload, there were other activities relating to the submission of the proposal which were time-consuming and over which they had little control. These included:

- Obtaining letters of support
- Consolidating institutional support
- Negotiating commitment from stakeholders.

In addition, the vast majority of respondents (92%) indicated a preference for a two-stage selection process. Such a process stage would include: Stage 1- people would be invited to complete a brief (say 2 page) Expression of Interest which would provide information from which a shortlist could be prepared. Only people shortlisted at this preliminary stage would be invited to submit full proposals (Stage 2).

Respondents provided a range of reasons to support their preference for a two-stage selection process. These included:

- Stage 1 would provide an opportunity to confirm that the ideas and concepts presented were in line with the objectives of the project. Such an opportunity would benefit all stakeholders. It would benefit the Selection Committee as it would provide an efficient way to eliminate proposals that were not appropriate to the objectives of the project. It would benefit the national Project Managers who could concentrate their support and advice on shortlisted proposals. It would benefit proposers who could test their concepts and ideas before developing a full proposal.
- A brief outline of the core aspects of a proposal is easy to summarise without fleshing out the details – it also gives selectors more time to gain additional feedback on key aspects.

Further comments from respondents are provided in Appendix 3.

#### *Recommendation 2*

*A two-stage selection process should be examined for adoption in future rounds of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project. Processes used within a two-stage selection process should developed to (a) enhance organisational commitment to the project; (b) encourage collaboration between stakeholders in the development of proposals especially between proposers and Project Managers; (c) maintain interest and enthusiasm among potential leaders.*

#### **Feedback on Tenders**

The majority of survey respondents reported satisfaction with the nature and quality of feedback on tenders. Individuals who were unsuccessful in their submission to become Flexible Learning Leaders were less satisfied with feedback than those who were successful. More specifically, 93% of successful proposers reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with feedback on their proposals; 61% of unsuccessful proposers reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with feedback on their proposals.

Specific comments from survey respondents are provided in Appendix 3. Some survey respondents offered the following suggestions for improvement and these are also provided in Appendix 3.

#### ***Recommendation 3***

*The provision of timely and meaningful feedback to both successful and unsuccessful proposers should be a key feature of all future iterations on the Flexible Learning Leaders Project.*

#### ***Recommendation 4***

*A range of communication strategies should be developed to assist in the provision of feedback to individuals and organisations applying for Flexible Learning Leaders. Communication strategies should be scalable to suit the need and feedback requirements of individuals.*

## Induction

Induction workshops were held during July and early August for all project participants. As well as providing an important opportunity for participants to meet each other and share their plans and strategies, the workshops aimed to:

- Contextualise the project within the *Collaborative Framework for Flexible Learning in VET* and the Strategy 2000 projects.
- Explain and discuss expectations of the project
- Discuss development plans and budgets
- Introduce the Flexible Learning Leaders website and outline the on-line forums.

Each workshop participant was provided with a 'Participant Kit' which contained practical information and resources including:

- Contact details of project personnel
- Dates of key project events
- Reporting requirements
- Instructions and protocols for accessing the FFL website and on-line forums.

The 'Kit' also provided a copy of the *Collaborative Framework for Flexible Learning in VET* and associated documents.

Feedback from workshop participants was very positive and the Induction Workshops were successful in generating high levels of enthusiasm for the project. The Induction Workshops also contributed to collaboration between leaders and all leaders reported that they were appreciative of the opportunity to meet with other participants and to discuss plans and share ideas.

All participants reported that the Workshops contributed greatly to setting a positive tone for the project. Furthermore, the majority of leaders commented that the success of the workshop in establishing a strong foundation for the project was directly attributable to the Project Management Team who were knowledgeable, supportive and interested. Many leaders stressed that the major contributing factor to the success of the Induction Workshop was the positive, supportive project management approach. This approach allowed all participants to commence the project with confidence and enthusiasm.

Particular benefits of the workshops reported by participants are summarised below.

- All participants were appreciative of the opportunity to meet with other successful leaders and to discuss plans and share ideas.
- Most participants reported that the workshop assisted them to generate new enthusiasm for their projects. One participant described it as 'an enlivening experience'. Others stated that it provided them with a real impetus to start the project.
- All participants noted that they were very pleasantly surprised to discover a strong project focus on 'personal outcomes'. In particular, participants stated that the Project Manager did an excellent job of setting a positive tone for the project that did much to encourage enthusiasm and personal commitment. One participant stated that after the workshop, 'I have a great sense of confidence that the project is about us and our learning, not just about ANTA.'
- Participants also commented that they felt that the Project Management Team had used the workshop to lay the foundation for a very supportive management framework. Participants

reported that they were confident of obtaining ongoing advice and support during the life of the project.

- Expectations were clearly defined and presented – participants reported a much better understanding of their individual responsibilities and, more importantly, the responsibilities of other stakeholders, especially the responsibility of their own Institutes and/or organisations.
- Some participants reported that their expectations of the project changed as a result of the workshop and that they have also made significant changes to their project plans following post-workshop reflection.
- All participants reported that the Induction Kit was well presented and contained important information. One participant summed up the general view of the kit with the words, ‘a great resource for use back at the Institute.’
- Several participants commented specifically on the Project Manager. These unsolicited comments were very positive and focused mainly on positive project tone created by the Project Manager. As one participant stated, ‘she’s got good knowledge, good contacts, good resources and she’s happy to share – she gives good advice’.
- Participants were also asked for suggestions on how the workshops might be improved for future rounds of the program. Participants stressed that they were very happy about the workshops and little could be done to improve them. In this context, participants made some suggestions for minor improvements. Suggestions included:
  - A brief checklist of things to do following the workshop would have been helpful.
  - Access to computer facilities would have allowed us to ‘practice’ accessing the on-line forums.

#### ***Recommendation 5***

*Induction Kits and associated resources for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should build on the successes of the 2000 project to ensure useful and practical information is provided to Leaders at the commencement of the project.*

#### ***Recommendation 6***

*A single national Induction Program should be considered for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project. A single national program would offer significant benefits including improved opportunities for networking, increased chances for collaboration and cooperation, and, an opportunity to develop and consolidate a learning community of Flexible Learning Leaders.*

## National Project Management and Support

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### Communication

Ongoing communication between individual Flexible Learning Leaders and the national Project Managers has been achieved through workshops, telephone discussions, e-mail, forums and some face-to-face communication. These approaches have been successful in developing strong working relationships and have resulted in the following outcomes.

- Project management and administrative information has been communicated in a logical and coherent manner.
- Important information has been provided to Leaders in a timely manner.
- Leaders have been able to submit reports in an effective manner.
- Leaders have been able to share information easily and effectively.
- Sound and reliable communication strategies have contributed significantly to the development of positive relationships between individual leaders and the national Project Managers.

The success of the communication strategies outlined above is underpinned by a project management approach which itself values learning and recognises that successful innovation and leadership must be well planned, highly consultative and reflective. In this context the Flexible Learning Leaders Project Management approach has been characterised by:

- Open communication
- A strong emphasis on learning (individual and collaborative)
- Respect for diversity
- Flexibility.

The flexibility of the Project Team was appreciated... The professional trust was a very effective strategy. Not being bogged down by extensive report writing was both refreshing and more productive... I felt the Project Team was very sensitive to my learning style and did all they could to support me. When I needed advice or clarification, it was readily forthcoming, but there was no unnecessary intervention or interference. To me FLL was an intense and focused journey that was fully supported by the Project Team.

#### **Recommendation 7**

*Project Management approaches for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should be based on the principles which guided the 2000 project – approaches which value learning and recognise that successful innovation and leadership must be well planned, consultative and reflective.*

### Links with Strategy 2000 projects

In August 1999 States and Territories embarked on a ambitious policy program, *Flexible Learning for the Information Economy: A Framework for National Collaboration in Vocational Education and Training 2000 – 2004*. The policy aimed at providing the VET sector with the tools to help industry embrace the information economy. To support the policy, States and Territories have, through EVAG, embarked on a number of programs and strategies to support the aims of the Collaborative Framework. The programs and strategies are collectively branded as Strategy 2000 projects. The Flexible Learning Leaders' Program is a Strategy 2000 project.

Within this context, the National Project Managers of the Flexible Learning Leaders' Program have ensured that the program is strongly linked to current policy initiatives in several ways, by:

- Ensuring that all leaders have a good knowledge and appreciation of the aims of the Collaborative Framework through the induction workshops and other information dissemination strategies
- Ensuring that all leaders are familiar with Strategy 2000
- Facilitating links between Strategy 2000 projects especially between those related to the achievement of 'creative, capable people'
- Promotion of the Flexible Learning Leaders' Program throughout the national VET sector
- Encouraging and promoting strategies that encourage providers to move towards more flexible, customised delivery options to cater for the specific needs of clients, thus supporting policy initiatives geared at increasing client choice in training options.

*Recommendation 8*

*The Flexible Learning Leaders Project should continue to be directed by national policy directions and the project should consolidate and maintain strong links with other national projects.*

## **Promoting the Flexible Learning Leaders Project**

While the Flexible Learning Leaders project is closely linked with other Strategy 2000 projects (especially those relating to the aim - creative, capable people), it represents a new approach to the ongoing development and adoption of flexible learning in vocational education and training. Like other professional development projects, Flexible Learning Leaders provides an opportunity for VET practitioners to enhance skills, knowledge and experience in flexible learning. Its uniqueness, however, comes from its stated aim to develop a nation-wide groups of people able to lead Australian VET in flexible learning pedagogy as well as the technical skills required to apply information technologies to flexible learning.

While the impact of this leadership role will only become evident over the next two years, the national Project Managers have established a strong platform of information on the project throughout the VET sector. The Project Managers have adopted a range of information and communication techniques and strategies to promote and gain commitment from VET stakeholders. These have included:

- Informal consultations with key people in VET at national, state and regional /local levels
- Coordination of presentations at key national conferences, especially Networking 2000
- Promotion of interim outcomes to stakeholders.

Through these and other activities, the national Project Managers have generated considerable interest in and enthusiasm for the concept of Flexible Learning Leaders and the project itself. Several indicators point to the success of these strategies:

- Support for the concept and the project by key stakeholders
- Strong commitment to the project by current leaders and their organisations

Since I was new to my job in 2000, most of the leadership opportunities I have had have been new. However, the Flexible Learning Leaders project has enabled me to have a higher, more authoritative profile within [my Institute] and also within [my state]. A good example of the latter is that I was invited to be part of the working party developing the [state] Flexible Learning Strategy for 2001, something that probably wouldn't have happened before.

- High levels of interest in future iterations of the project by VET practitioners and VET organisations.

#### *Recommendation 9*

*Promotion strategies for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should build on the successes of the 2000 project to maintain strong support for the project. Strategies should seek to expand current levels of interest and enthusiasm as well as a more widespread appreciation of benefits to the VET sector.*

## **National Workshops**

The Flexible Learning Leaders Program National Workshop was held in Melbourne on 4 and 5 September (a third day was devoted to site visits). All Flexible Learning Leaders attended the two-day workshop.

## **Evaluation Framework for the National Workshop**

The Evaluation Team in consultation with the National Project Managers developed an evaluation framework for the national workshop. The Framework outlined the major aims of the workshop and provided a broad outline and thematic concerns to guide evaluation activities. A copy of the framework is provided in Appendix 3.

## **Value of the National Workshop to Participants**

Workshop participants reported that the workshop was informative, helpful and enjoyable. Participants reported that the single most valuable aspect of the workshop was the opportunity to meet with and discuss issues and concerns with other Flexible Learning Leaders. While there had been an opportunity for some leaders to meet with and exchange views with other leaders during the Induction Workshops, the national workshop provided an enhanced opportunity by bringing all leaders together.

Other aspects that participants reported as useful or valuable included:

- Participants reported that the workshop provided a further opportunity to test and refine project strategies and approaches through informal discussions with other leaders
- All participants reported that the strategic sessions outlining current policies and strategies were useful. Several participants reported that they appreciated the attendance at the workshop of key personnel from ANTA and other government agencies. It provided tangible evidence of the national commitment to the project and to the leaders. It also provided an opportunity for the leaders to make themselves known to the ANTA personnel.
- A great networking occasion
  - ‘I’ve really bonded with some other leaders’ – ‘Keeping in touch with other leaders is going to be so much easier after this.’ Several participants observed that this was the most valuable aspect of the workshop.
- All participants interviewed to date stated that the venue and catering was good to excellent. The majority stated that a ‘live-in’ workshop provide important opportunities for informal discussion and networking. All reported that they enjoyed the workshop dinners. A few found the location of the venue isolated.

The one experience that stands out, though, was the Flexible Learning Leaders workshop. It was refreshing and encouraging to share experiences and ideas with people who implicitly understood what it was like to be responsible for moving (sometimes conservative) organisations towards acceptance and adoption of flexible approaches to learning.

Aspects of the workshop which were considered least useful or valuable included:

- Several participants reported that the session on leadership was not useful to them personally. Various reasons were provided:
  - Familiarity with the process
  - The session was not contextualised for our specific needs
  - Session was too long
  - Session did not allow for discussion and debate of issues and concerns raised.

However, the majority of those who reported that this session was not useful cited the skills and approach of the presenter as the biggest problem – ‘I was not connecting with the presenter – there was a personal barrier between me and him.’

- A small number of participants indicated that they found the site visits on Day 3 to be too exhausting after a fairly intensive two-day workshop. The value of the site visits was diminished for these participants due to the timing immediately after the workshop. Other participants, however, found the site visits to be particularly valuable.

## **Suggestions for Future National Workshops**

A number of leaders suggested strategies and approaches which might be employed to make future national workshops even more valuable and effective. Suggestions included:

- More interaction and discussion – perhaps some small group sessions on particular issues identified as important to the program.
- While several participants reported that the timing of the workshop was a very difficult issue and presented significant challenges for all stakeholders, the majority suggested that the workshop should be held earlier in the program to facilitate networking and collaborative learning. However, some found this timing was about right for them.
- The majority of interviewed participants reported that they would have liked the opportunity to ‘find out more about all the individual projects’. When participants were canvassed about this issue, several difficulties were identified including:
  - Finding enough time in the program for each leader to present an outline of his/her project
  - Facilitating meaningful discussion and debate about the individual programs.

However, most participants suggested that perceived problems could be overcome by careful planning and the potential benefits to leaders and other stakeholders would easily outweigh the effort of overcoming perceived difficulties. Potential benefits reported by participants included:

- Improved networking and collaboration between leaders
  - Reduction in the potential for duplication
  - Increased understanding and appreciation of the diversity of skills and interests of leaders.
- Several participants suggested that the workshop program was too ‘crammed’ or too ‘intense’ and future programs might reduce the spread of activity and be more focused. One participant suggested that the primary focus of the workshop should be on leadership in flexible delivery – ‘one session was not enough, neither was it appropriate to our needs’.
  - One participant suggested that the provision of more comfortable chairs might improve outcomes.

## **Organisation of the Workshop**

All participants reported that the workshop was very well organised and appreciated the efforts of the National Project Managers in planning and conducting the Workshop.

### *Recommendation 10*

*National workshops in future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should be planned and conducted earlier in the life of the project to facilitate network and collaborative learning.*

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## Leaders' Project Management

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This section of the report briefly canvases issues associated with the individual management of Leaders' Development projects. That is, it reports on issues that influenced the effectiveness and efficiency of individual Flexible Learning Leaders' projects.

### Institutional Support

At the commencement of the project, some participants were concerned that maintaining institutional support and commitment might prove difficult during the project. However, telephone interviews conducted during the last month of the project indicated that institutional support had, in most cases, remained high throughout the project. Institutions remained committed in two key ways. Firstly, they continued to support the concept of the Flexible Learning Leaders project and remained enthusiastic about its future. Secondly, the majority of Institutions remained highly supportive of individual leaders and were optimistic that leaders would contribute significantly to institution planning and delivery over the next 12 to 24 months.

Other evidence of continuing institutional support includes:

- Leaders participating in Institute-based strategic planning processes
- Leaders conducting workshops and information sessions for departments and faculties within their Institution
- Institutional expectations that leaders will play key roles in future innovations.

### Time Management

Managing time and conflicting demands was a continuing challenge for all leaders. All leaders reported that time pressures arising from the project impacted significantly on their ability to manage and negotiate conflicting demands. This was exacerbated by the short project timeframes resulting in projects being conducted in a six month period (July 2000 to December 2000).

#### *Recommendation 11*

*Future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should aim to ensure that adequate time is allocated for Leaders to effectively conduct individual projects.*

### Managing Networks and Resources

Several participants expressed a desire to develop more collaborative approaches to managing networks and resources. Several leaders targeted the same people and organisations. Leaders suggested that more effort be directed towards the reduction of duplication especially regarding the organisation of national and international visits. The organisation of visits was found to be extremely time-consuming, and some coordination in this area was considered likely to reduce the burden on individuals. Coordination is seen to be important not only for the sake of the leaders, but also to avoid placing unnecessary burdens on those visited, who are often the subjects of interest from people involved in many national projects, and who give generously of their time.

**Recommendation 12**

*Future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should incorporate mechanisms and strategies to facilitate greater collaborative planning in order to reduce duplication and promote cooperation (especially in relation to national and international site visits.)*

**Reporting**

Leaders were required to provide progress and final reports on their development projects. All leaders indicated that the reporting requirements were fair and manageable.

## Communication and Collaboration

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The Flexible Learning Leaders program consisted of individual development projects which differed considerably in nature and aims; nevertheless, it was the intention of the Project Managers to develop a learning community in which the participants would enrich their own projects through interaction with each other. The national workshop, previously discussed, was one means of building this community. The other principal means was the on-line forum which was intended to develop a virtual learning community.

### Use of the On-line Forum

The On-line Forum was mounted at [flexiblelearning.net.au](http://flexiblelearning.net.au) on an EdNA server. It consisted of a project web site, a threaded discussion area, and a chat area. The site was password protected.

The purpose of the forum was identified by the Project Managers as an activity for the advancement of learning, and specifically:

- Socialisation
- Sharing of information
- Sharing and discussion of issues
- Collection of useful resources
- A way to provide and share updates
- Adding value to self-development programs by sharing with the group and cross-fertilisation of ideas
- Development of contacts, including the development of an e-mail network.

Participants were required to post weekly to the discussion, alternating between updates on their progress, and discussion of issues. Participants could choose whether to participate in the discussion via the web site, via an e-mail list, or via a daily digest of the list. The discussion was moderated by project staff.

Project staff supported participants in the use of the forum by means of postings intended to stimulate discussion; collection of resources posted by participants; providing a variety of experiences, activities and resources aimed at ensuring there was something useful for everyone;

### Responses to the Forum

The views of the participants about the forum were mixed. Some participants found it a valuable means of interacting and a rich source of information. Others found the time demands excessive. The responses depended in part upon the participant's degree of familiarity and comfort with on-line interaction. A secondary factor was whether on-line services were central to the participant's area of interest or not.

Slow loading was a problem early in the life of the forum, though matters improved somewhat thanks to the ready response and hard work of EdNA technical support staff. A number of participants continued to find the system cumbersome, in particular finding the process of logging on and navigating between messages tiresome. Many participants chose the option of receiving forum messages as e-mail rather than reading them on the web.

Provide an online forum that's pre-tested and easier to get to and use with more initial pro-active encouragement online to get people more actively involved in forum and additional support for those who are not experienced with or not comfortable with online forums.

An eGroups discussion was set up as an alternative. Few participants made use of this facility, though the responsiveness of the project team in setting up this alternative was appreciated.

Some participants who were already committed participants in other on-line forums such as LearnScope suggested that an existing venue of this kind could have been used, and that some of the workload involved might thus have been avoided.

Many participants expressed strong appreciation of the effort and skills of the forum moderators.

## The Forum as a Learning Community

One of the expressed aims for the forum was the development of a virtual learning community. Some participants questioned whether the forum contributed to the achievement of the program's aims. It is therefore worth considering in some detail whether a virtual learning community evolved.

The recent work of Jennifer Preece provides a framework within which the forum can be considered as a community. This work discusses usability and sociability as characteristics of on-line communities. Preece defines an on-line community as a group that has:

- A shared purpose: for example, focus on an interest, need, information, service, or support, that provides a reason for belonging to the community.
- People: who interact with each other and who may take roles within the community.
- Policies: language and protocols that guide people's interactions. Folklore and rituals that bring a sense of history and accepted social norms. Formal policies to provide governance<sup>1</sup>.

Key usability and sociability features are summarised in the following table.

**Table 1: Usability and sociability features<sup>2</sup>**

Users' questions	Usability solutions	Sociability solutions	FLL Forum
1 Why should I join this community?	Clear and meaningful name. Clear description of the community's purpose.  Attractively presented content (consider design of content: color, graphics etc.)  Promise of change, new content and interaction.	The title and content should communicate the community's purpose effectively and attract people.	The nature and contents of the forum were clearly identified.  The web site was appropriate in design.  Many participants found the discussion area to be slow to load and cumbersome to navigate.
2 How do I join or leave?	Clear instructions for registering.  Short procedure  Reassurance that personal details are respected.	Decide on an open or closed community depending on such issues as the sensitivity of topics discussed and whether participation needs to be controlled.	Subscription was easy and well managed. An appropriate decision was made that the forum would be a closed community.
3 What are the rules?	Clearly and concisely worded and appropriately positioned policies.	Determine policies and decide whether a moderator is needed to enforce rules and arbitrate. Make decisions about disclaimers,	The rules were clearly understood by all participants, but given the nature of the group and the purpose of the project, it might have been more appropriate to negotiate policies such as required frequency of posting as a group

<sup>1</sup>Preece, J., *What Happens After You Get On-line? Usability and Sociability*, December 1999, [http://www.ciSp.org/imp/december\\_99/12\\_99preece.htm](http://www.ciSp.org/imp/december_99/12_99preece.htm), accessed December 2000

<sup>2</sup> adapted from Preece, J., *ibid.*

		copyright etc.	activity. This would be possible next year when the national workshop is held early in the project.
4 How do I read and send messages?	Determine what kind of support is needed and how to provide it - e.g. templates, emoticons, FAQs, single messages or digests for listservers etc	Provide support for newcomers. Facilitate sending private and group messages.	The support and encouragement of the moderators was excellent and appreciated by all participants.
5 Can I do what I want easily? (Is it available and obtainable?)	Find ways to support communication needs - e.g., provide different formats for information such as web pages, FAQs, content of messages; search facilities, effective help at the right level; private communication etc.	Ensure that the community is a congenial place where people can do what they want to do.	The ability to interact with the forum in different ways (e-mail, digests, web) allowed for different user preferences.  Technical imperfections referred to above reduced the congeniality for some participants, while others found it a rich component of the program.
6 Is the community safe? (Privacy, anonymity, protection against inappropriate behavior)	Find ways to: protect personal information; secure transaction processing; support private discussion; protect people from aggressive behavior as appropriate.	Consider whether a moderator and stronger rules are needed to ensure appropriate behavior.  Determine what level of confidentiality and security is needed.	As a closed forum with a small number of members, safety was not an issue. All participants demonstrated respect and courtesy towards each other.
7 Can I express myself as I wish?	Emoticons, content icons, seamless link to private email, web-pages etc.	Determine the kind of communication for a community with this purpose and how it should be supported.	A suitable, professional but informal tone was set early in the program.
8 Why should I come back?	Provide changing content: e.g., news broadcast, provocateur to stimulate discussion etc.	Determine how to entice people back.	As noted above, some participants were keen to use the forum. It is difficult to see how those who were not so keen could have been further encouraged, except by involving them in the negotiation of rules and norms.

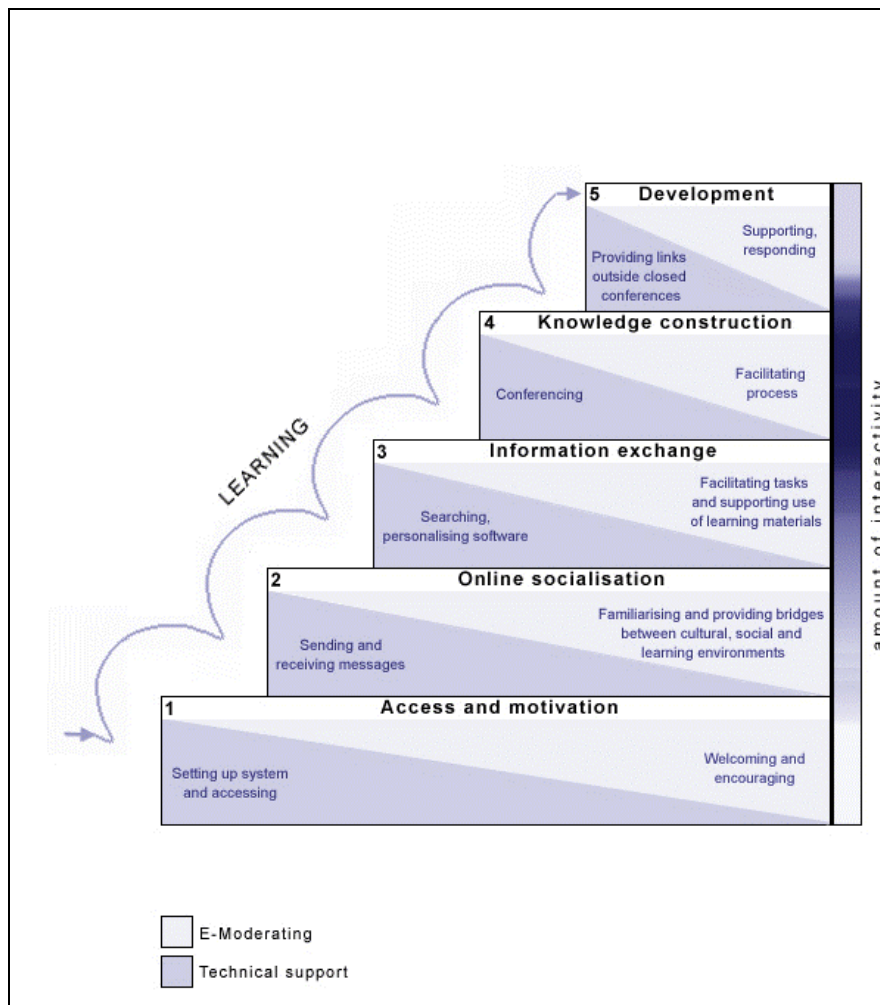
As the intention was to develop not just an on-line community, but a virtual learning community, it is worth considering the five-step model developed by Gilly Salmon. While this is not entirely applicable to this project, since it is aimed at the development of moderating skills for a group studying a single course, it nevertheless gives some insight into the way in which a virtual learning community can develop. Dr Salmon suggests that:

Individual access and the ability of participants to use CMC are essential prerequisites for conference participation (stage one, at the base of the flights of steps). Stage two involves individual participants establishing their online identities and then finding others with whom to interact. At stage three, participants give information relevant to the course to each other. Up to and including stage three, a form of co-operation occurs, i.e. support for each person's goals. At stage four, course-related group discussions occur and the interaction becomes more collaborative. The communication depends on the establishment of common understandings. At stage five, participants look for more benefits from the system to help them achieve personal

goals, explore how to integrate CMC into other forms of learning and reflect on the learning processes<sup>3</sup>.

This is represented diagrammatically as follows:

**Diagram 1: The Fivestep Model<sup>4</sup>**



All members of the group had at least a reasonable degree of familiarity with the use of on-line services, while some were leaders in the field of on-line learning. In terms of access, Step 1 was easily achieved, and the project team provided a warm welcome and encouragement. As noted above, motivation might have been stronger if participants had been involved in negotiating the 'rules' for the forum, rather than being directed to post at specified intervals. This will be easier to achieve in future, making use of the national workshop. The process of negotiation might have formed a useful part of Step 2; but the need for a speedy finalisation of action plans probably precluded this.

I found the forum a great source of information even if I was not the greatest contributor. I tended to contact people individually to follow up ideas from the forum. However I believe that there were too many possible sections to contribute to and this made it cumbersome and somewhat arduous.

<sup>3</sup> Salmon, G., 'The Fivestep Model', in *E-Moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning On-line*, <http://oubs.open.ac.uk/e-moderating/fivestep.htm> accessed December 2000

<sup>4</sup> Salmon, G., *ibid.*

The comparative homogeneity, and strong motivation towards learning, of the group reduced the need to establish social norms.

Participants exchanged information (Step 3) willingly and generously, and were ably supported by the moderators, by means of encouragement, gentle nudging where necessary, and synthesis of information. It had been intended to build a database of resources suggested by participants and moderators, but time was insufficient to do this.

Steps 4 and 5 took place, and indeed a number of virtual learning communities emerged. These, however, proved to be subgroups with specific common interests or affinities. These subgroups were dynamic and based on personal and professional needs, and so they are likely to endure and indeed to have a significant effect on the individuals concerned, and on the development of flexible learning in VET. But they generally took place via individual emails, telephone and face to face meetings, and so the influence of the forum was minor. This was not due to any lack of care or skill on the part of the moderators, who were universally praised, but because the community of interest and ease of use of the forum were not strong enough to bind the whole group together.

A component of the forum which has not yet been mentioned was the chat room. This received little if any use, and it is suggested that it be discontinued in the future, or else made available as a more structured activity.

***Recommendation 13***

*A framework for use of the on-line forum should be negotiated between the Project Managers and participants early in the project, at the national workshop.*

***Recommendation 14***

*Excessive additional workloads for the participants should be avoided by linking the Flexible Learning Leaders forum with a suitable existing forum such as LearnScope.*

## Leadership in Flexible Delivery

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This section of the report considers issues related to the development of leadership as a result of the Flexible Learning Leaders project. The project brief states that ‘The Flexible Learning Leaders Program aims to develop a nationwide group of VET practitioners able to lead Australian VET in flexible learning pedagogy, and in the technical skills required to apply information technologies to flexible learning’.

### Diversity of Participants

It was evident from the outset that the group of Leaders selected for the program consisted of two distinct groups: those who were already well known and influential in their own organisations or in a wider sphere, and those who were not yet in a leadership position but had been selected as showing the potential to develop as leaders. This disparity was the subject of some discussion both during and after the national workshop.

The aims of the second group, in general, included the development of defined skills and the acquisition of knowledge to support their development as leaders. The first group, on the other hand, tended to integrate the project more closely into their existing work; some used it primarily to extend or add depth to their existing research.

While both approaches have merit, it is clear that the title of the program is ambiguous both for potential applicants for the program and for the VET system as a whole. Is it a leadership development program, or is it a scholarship program? If the former, it would be beneficial to include a more in-depth consideration of leadership issues and qualities in the national workshop, and to encourage participants to reflect on their own leadership development in their final reports. If the latter, it may be necessary to re-examine the background in leadership which is expected of applicants.

### The Future Leadership Role of Participants

Some participants have expressed a degree of uncertainty about what is expected of them after the program. While they understand that they should participate in the development of flexible learning at the state/territory and national level, not all are clear about how or to what degree they are expected to do this. This subject could be a further topic for discussion at the national workshop.

It appears that opportunities for leadership development after the conclusion of the program will depend partly on the support and commitment of the participants’ organisations. It has already been noted that most organisations have been supportive of the participants during the program.

Not all have as yet decided how best to make use of their staff member’s learning. One organisation expressed concern about how the participant would re-integrate into the team in view of the personal and professional development that had taken place during the program.

Most organisations, however, took a more positive view, and expected that the benefits would be felt at least at the team level and usually at the organisation level. Several considered that the benefits would spread from the participant’s immediate team to the organisation as a whole over a period of up to two years. In some cases, changes had already been made to organisational structures and processes to capitalise on the learning of the participant.

I would love to bring my expertise and non-public sector experience as a mentor to FLLs in next year’s round. My organisation fully supports this policy.

## Future Program Directions

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This first implementation of the Flexible Learning Leaders Program has, in general, successfully achieved its aims. Desirable refinements of the program are minor.

As suggested in the previous section, the goal of the program should be reviewed during the next application round, to ensure a clarity of focus on the role of leadership development in the program. While the program should combine elements of organisational development and personal development, a consistent approach is required to the balanced expected between these two elements.

The participants in the first program have between them a wealth of knowledge and experience which could be of great value to future participants. This could form part of the leadership role expected of these people. One way to harness this experience would be to invite previous leaders to participate in on-line forums, either spontaneously or in an organised activity such as an 'expert spruik' event.

Some brief 'how-to' guides could form a useful resource for future participants, and previous participants could be consulted in the preparation of these. An example would be 'How to organise an overseas visit', which might include tips on scheduling travel and visits in such a way as to keep exhaustion at bay while keeping costs within reasonable bounds, coordinating visits with other Leaders participants, tips for approaching overseas organisations, suitable 'thank-you' gifts, and cheap ways of communicating with the office and project staff while overseas.

At a national level, while participants may find for themselves ways of contributing to the development of flexible learning, it is likely to require a deliberate effort on the part of national bodies to ensure that the growing expertise and confidence of the program participants is drawn upon in the future.

### **Recommendation 15**

*It is recommended that those bodies responsible for coordination of national flexible learning activities include in their implementation plans a means of utilising the expertise of participants in the Flexible Learning Leaders program.*

Looking within the project, the preference has already been noted for holding the national workshop earlier in the program. A number of the participants also expressed a strong desire for a final social event to form a distinct closure to the program. This was not feasible, but could be considered in future years.

## Conclusion

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Virtually all the participants in this first Flexible Learning Leaders Program have indicated that the program has been of great personal and professional value to themselves and their organisations. This is due both to the opportunity provided by the program itself, and also to the encouragement and support provided by all members of the Project Team.

Having participated in a number of other professional development projects I found the lack of “bureaucracy” in this project completely refreshing. Not having to spend hours on preparing the application and numerous progress and evaluation reports meant that I could totally focus on my area of interest. The style of the reporting requirements that did exist added value to my experience in the project rather than detracting from it. I can’t reinforce this point enough – in my opinion the risk taken by allowing this freedom is far outweighed by the benefits. I would like to acknowledge and thank ANTA for this extremely valuable opportunity.

## Recommendations

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### **Recommendation 1**

Tender documentation for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should build on the success of the 2000 project to ensure documentation:

- Uses succinct language and provides consistent and relevant information
- Outlines selection processes and responsibilities
- Articulates selection criteria
- Outlines roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders
- Provides sample budget
- Provides cases studies and examples of successful projects
- Articulates expectations of tenderers and their proposals.

### **Recommendation 2**

A two-stage selection process should be examined for adoption in future rounds of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project. Processes used within a two-stage selection process should developed to (a) enhance organisational commitment to the project; (b) encourage collaboration between stakeholders in the development of proposals especially between proposers and Project Managers; (c) maintain interest and enthusiasm among potential leaders.

### **Recommendation 3**

The provision of timely and meaningful feedback to both successful and unsuccessful proposers should be a key feature of all future iterations on the Flexible Learning Leaders Project.

### **Recommendation 4**

A range of communication strategies should be developed to assist in the provision of feedback to individuals and organisations applying for Flexible Learning Leaders. Communication strategies should be scalable to suit the need and feedback requirements of individuals.

### **Recommendation 5**

Induction Kits and associated resources for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should build on the successes of the 2000 project to ensure useful and practical information is provided to Leaders at the commencement of the project.

### **Recommendation 6**

A single national Induction Program should be considered for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project. A single national program would offer significant benefits including improved opportunities for networking, increased chances for collaboration and cooperation, and, an opportunity to develop and consolidate a learning community of Flexible Learning Leaders.

### **Recommendation 7**

Project Management approaches for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should be based on the principles which guided the 2000 project – approaches which value learning and recognise that successful innovation and leadership must be well planned, consultative and reflective.

**Recommendation 8**

The Flexible Learning Leaders Project should continue to be directed by national policy directions and the project should consolidate and maintain strong links with other national projects.

**Recommendation 9**

Promotion strategies for future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should build on the successes of the 2000 project to maintain strong support for the project. Strategies should seek to expand current levels of interest and enthusiasm as well as a more widespread appreciation of benefits to the VET sector.

**Recommendation 10**

National workshops in future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should be planned and conducted earlier in the life of the project to facilitate networking and collaborative learning.

**Recommendation 11**

Future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should aim to ensure that adequate time is allocated for Leaders to effectively conduct individual projects.

**Recommendation 12**

Future iterations of the Flexible Learning Leaders project should incorporate mechanisms and strategies to facilitate greater collaborative planning in order to reduce duplication and promote cooperation (especially in relation to national and international site visits.)

**Recommendation 13**

A framework for use of the on-line forum should be negotiated between the Project Managers and participants early in the project, at the national workshop.

**Recommendation 14**

Excessive additional workloads for the participants should be avoided by linking the Flexible Learning Leaders forum with a suitable existing forum such as LearnScope.

**Recommendation 15**

Those bodies responsible for coordination of national flexible learning activities should include in their implementation plans a means of utilising the expertise of participants in the Flexible Learning Leaders program.

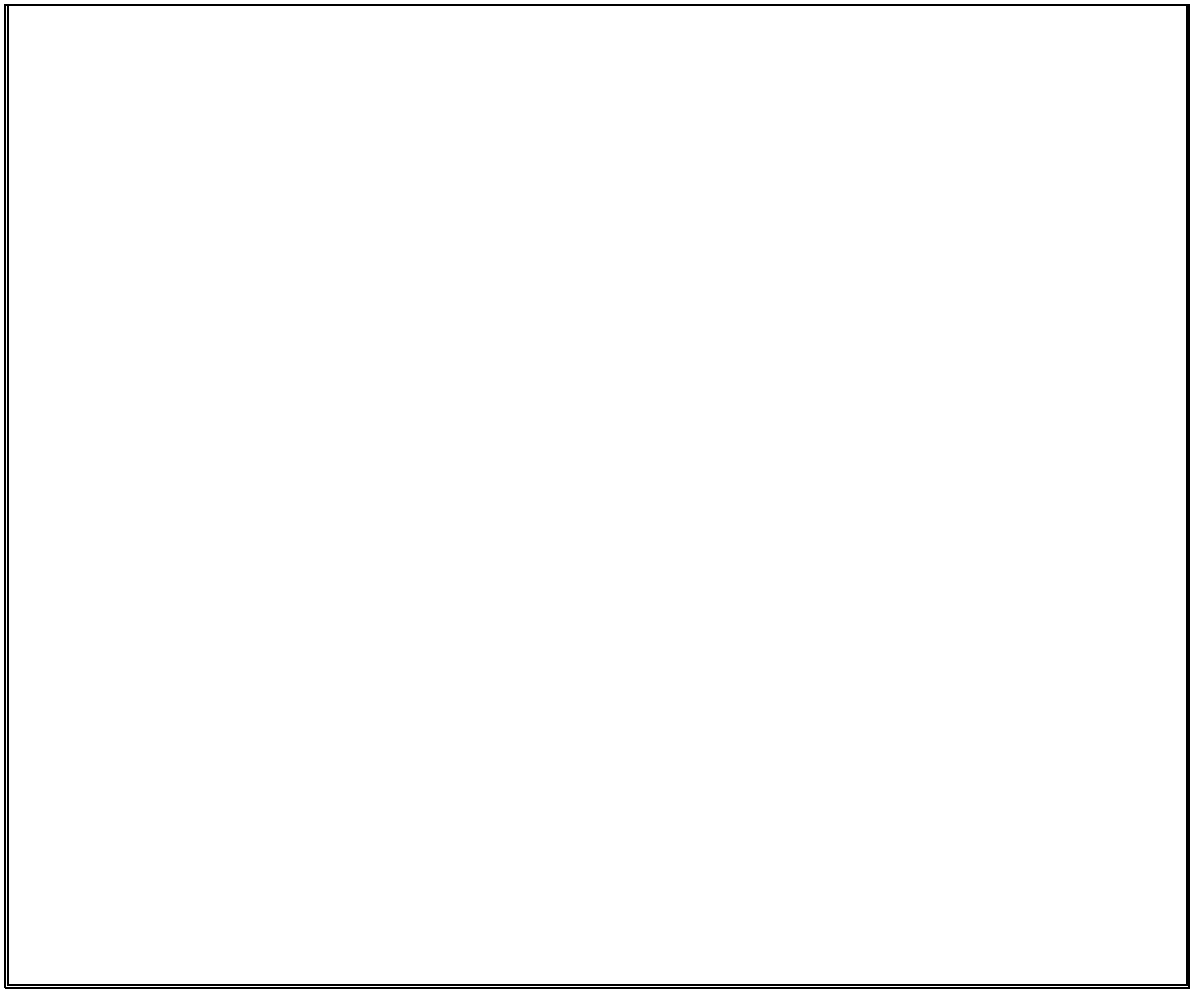
## Appendices

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## Appendix 1 Interview Proformas

### Flexible Learning Leaders – Record of Interview.1

<b>Name of Interviewee</b>	
<b>Date of Interview</b>	
<b>Purpose of Interview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make initial contact with Project Participants and provide, if necessary, information on evaluation program</li><li>• Gather initial participant comments on Induction Program</li><li>• Gather initial participant views on emerging issues</li></ul>
<b>Starter Questions and Interview Notes</b>	
<b>Induction Program</b> (What were your expectations of the Induction Program? Were they met? Timing of the program? What were the outcomes of the program for you? Have you communicated with the Project Manager or other fellows since the Induction? How? What was most useful to you personally? What was least useful? How might you improve the program for future rounds of program? )	
<b>Emerging Issues</b> (At this early stage of the program, are there issues you would like to raise which have impacted on the program or, in your view, might impact on the program?)	
<b>Post Interview Notes – Evaluator's Reflections</b>	



## Flexible Learning Leaders – Record of Interview (2)

<b>Name of Interviewee</b>	
<b>Date of Interview</b>	
<b>Purpose of Interview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Test initial participant perceptions of the national workshop (gathered during the workshop)</li><li>• To further investigate participant perceptions of the national workshop</li><li>• To identify and examine emerging issues</li></ul>
<b>Starter Questions and Interview Notes</b>	
<b>National Workshop</b> <p>(What were your expectations of the national workshop? Were they met? Did the workshop support the achievement of your program goals? Did the timing of the program support your program goals? What were the major outcomes of the program for you? What was most useful to you personally? What was least useful? How might you improve the program for future rounds?) [Note: Areas for discussion may include content, format, social aspects of the workshop; networking opportunities with fellow Leaders, with speakers and with other participants; and the value of opportunities for discussion with project team members.]</p>	

**Emerging Issues**

(Are there issues you would like to raise which are impacting on the program?)

**Tendering and Selection Processes**

(I'd like you to complete and return a brief survey on tendering and selection processes.)

**Post Interview Notes – Evaluator's Reflections**

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**Flexible Learning Leaders – Record of Interview (3)**

<b>Name of Interviewee</b>	
<b>Date of Interview</b>	
<b>Purpose of Interview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update evolving key issues impacting on the Flexible Learning Leaders Program</li></ul>

**Starter Questions and Interview Notes**

(What are your current expectations of the Program? Have they changed? What are the key issues impacting on you at this stage of the program? )

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**Project Timeline and Other Issues**

(What has been the impact has the project timeline? Are there other issues you would like to raise at this stage of the program?)

**Post Interview Notes – Evaluator’s Reflections**



**flexible Learning Leaders – Record of Interview (4)**

<b>Name of Interviewee</b>	
<b>Date of Interview</b>	
<b>Purpose of Interview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ascertain participants' views as they complete their projects</li><li>• Ascertain participants' views about the on-line forum</li></ul>
<b>Starter Questions and Interview Notes</b>	
<p><b>Project as a whole</b></p> <p>(What did you expect to gain from the project? To what degree have you achieved your aims? What worked well and not so well for you? [Aspects to consider include your motivation and management of conflicting priorities; support from your organisation; support from the project team; helpfulness of project management and procedures.] Have you shared your learning with your organisation (or do you plan to)? If so, how? Does your organisation have any plans in place to make use of your experience? From which aspects of the project have you derived most benefit, personally, for your current work or for your future career? Do you have any advice for ANTA or the Project Managers for future iterations of the project? Do you see the project as having benefits for the VET system in general?)</p>	

**On-line Forum**

As the project draws to a close, what are your views about the project forum? Have they changed during the course of the project? Consider the purpose of the forum as it was explained to you, ease of use, the reliability of the technology, the moderation and management of the forum, and the content (its usefulness to you, and your contribution to it). To what extent did the forum contribute to the development of a learning community, or to the success of the project in general? Do you have any advice about the forum for ANTA and the Project Managers in future years?

**Emerging Issues**

Do you have any other comments on the project?

**Post Interview Notes – Evaluator’s Reflections**



### Flexible Learning Leaders – Record of Interview (5) (Organisational Managers)

<b>Name of Interviewee</b>	
<b>Date of Interview</b>	
<b>Purpose of Interview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make contact with Managers to ascertain organisation views of FLL Program</li><li>• Seek information of organisational benefits / challenges</li><li>• Seek views on future directions of FLL outcomes for the organisation</li></ul>
<b>Starter Questions and Interview Notes</b>	
<b>Organisational Views</b> (What were the organisational expectations of the FLL Program? Were they met? What were the outcomes of the program for the organisation? What has been most useful to the organisation? What was least useful? How might you improve the program for future rounds of program? )	

**Post Interview Notes – Evaluator's Reflections**

## Appendix 2 Survey – Tendering and Selection Processes

### ANTA FLEXIBLE LEARNING LEADERS PROGRAM

#### Survey of People who submitted Proposals for the ANTA Flexible Learning Leaders Program - 2000

This brief survey is designed to collect information to help ANTA and the national Project Managers to improve tendering and selection processes for future rounds of the Flexible Learning Leaders Program. Your assistance in completing this survey is greatly appreciated.

Please tick the appropriate box [√] to respond to the questions. You may tick a number of responses to each question. If you wish to comment at more length than this questionnaire allows, please feel free to add additional sheets.

#### **TENDER INFORMATION**

1. How did you become aware of the ANTA Flexible Learning Leaders Program?

- Newspaper Advertisement
- ANTA Web Site
- Professional Colleague or Network
- Other

If 'Other', please specify.

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2. How did you obtain the Project Brief and other related Tender information?

- Australia Post / Courier
- ANTA Web Site
- Professional Colleague or Network
- Other

If 'Other' please specify.

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3. How helpful was the Project Brief in assisting you prepare your proposal?

- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not helpful

Please explain your answer.

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4. How much assistance and/or advice did you receive from your organisation in compiling your proposal ?

- None
- Some
- A lot

If your answer is 'Some' or 'A lot', please specify how your organisation provided support.

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### **SELECTION PROCESS**

5. How long did it take you to prepare your proposal?

- Between 0 and 8 person-hours.
- Between 8 and 16 person hours
- Between 16 and 24 person hours
- Greater than 24 person hours

6. Would you support a two stage selection process? (In stage 1 people would be invited to complete a brief (say 2 page) Expression of Interest which would provide information from which a shortlist could be prepared. Only people shortlisted at this preliminary stage would be invited to submit full proposals.)

- Yes
- No

Please provide reasons for your response.

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**FEEDBACK ON PROPOSALS**

7. Were you satisfied with the level and nature of feedback provided to you by the National Project Managers during the selection process?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Not satisfied

Please explain your answer.

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8. If you indicated in Question 7 that you were not satisfied with feedback, how might it be improved?

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**OTHER ISSUES**

9. Are there any other issues relating to the Flexible Learning Leaders tendering and selection processes that you wish to comment on?

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.**

Please return survey to:

**FLEXIBLE LEARNING LEADERS EVALUATION**

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

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Even with a Project Brief, I always have to make contact with the National Project Manager to ensure nothing has been left out and needs to be expanded on.

It was not clear to me what the target group is for the program.

It did not give enough detail on the breath of acceptable projects nor the outcomes.

The issue of accessibility arises: access to the project management was limited, particularly at key times when preparing the proposal. Clarification is then needed, which could be provided in advance. The examples or case studies could be improved.

The brief outlined very clearly what the aims and objectives and requirements were.

I had to refer this to my manager – perhaps she could say how helpful she found it.

Considering I needed to obtain corporate support and approval to propose, the information was not clear and lead time from obtaining the approval, considering other workloads was inappropriate.

It was succinct and easy to use in comparison with other ANTA applications.

Organisational Assistance

None	√√√√√√√√√√√√
Some	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
A lot	√√√√√

**Selected Further Comments**

I wrote the complete application. My manager, who is also my project sponsor, reviewed the application corrected some factual errors and made suggestions for improving the application.

Some discussion with workplace nominated mentor.

Both my direct manager and my general manager had significant roles in the development of the submission. A desktop publisher was made available to format the document.

Other than to approve submission prior to sending it.

A colleague helped me with some of the application.

Worked as a team including Ass Director / Admin support and college manager to prepare submission over several full days.

Support was obtained through brainstorming sessions with colleagues.

Needed to gain Management support for the proposal and to link the application to the Institute's Strategic Directions.

Not relevant to a small organisation. In fact the Flexible Learning Leaders program does not seem to be designed for small organisations.

While the organisation supported the concept, only advice was provided, as assistance was not really available due to 'workloads' etc.

Assistant director provided feedback on my draft and wrote a letter of support. Director wrote a letter of support.

**Selection Process**

How long did you take to prepare your proposal?

Between 0 and 8 person hours	√√√√√
Between 8 and 16 person hours	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
Between 16 and 24 person hours	√√√√√
Greater than 24 person hours	√√√√√

**Support for a two-step process**

Yes	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
No	√√

**Selected Further Comment**

The full application requires a substantial effort. Furthermore, it requires two references and a letter of support for the project sponsor. If the project sponsor is not a senior executive then an additional letter of support is required. Negotiating

for these references and letters of support is very time consuming, instils some level of obligation and uses other people's valuable time. This should only be called on if there is a very high level of success. Likewise, the applicant should not only be required to put in effort to do the full application if there is a high probability of success. There can be a lot of work done, and with the possibility of embarrassment if applicant is not successful. Would be better to provide some support to ensure people put together a worthwhile program once they have been selected. Basis of selection???? Personal need? Organisational need? Compared with the Travelling scholarships, where people need to have every detail signed up beforehand – leaving people looking silly and having raised other people's expectations if they do not get accepted.

This would have been more efficient, particularly for those who eventually may not have been selected. It takes a lot of time writing the proposal without having to go back over it again. An FLL should be clear about what they want to do – otherwise, they are not ready to apply. Because these submissions take a lot of time to prepare especially as the requirement is to seek references for various people / organisations. Less time and effort involved until more likelihood of success.

I felt the hours spent developing the proposal were 'wasted'. A more streamlined selection process would be more beneficial as it would respect applicant's time and effort substantially.

Tender applications can come at any time and the work is always extra to the normal (very full) workload so a two-staged selection process would allow better time management. Also, there would be more incentive to submit a full proposal once shortlisted.

Would save people wasting time in preparing a full application if initial concept was not acceptable. This is an excellent idea – it would confirm that the selection criteria and ideas were in line with the objectives of the program. Possible as well to provide guidance to refine proposals. I believe this approach could also benefit the selection panel. I believe it would help remove any confusion.

An information sessions where applicants could have questions answered would also be helpful. A shortlist / expression of interest would mean less time wasted.

Yes, however this would likely become problematic. The nature of the criteria to be addressed would need to be conducive to short, succinct responses.

I think it would minimise the time and workload spent on researching the detail of the proposed plan. Brief outline on the core aspects of the project are easy to summarise with fleshing out of details to come later. It also gives selectors more time to gain additional feedback as to the key aspects.

Saves wasted effort if the proposal is not 'in the ball park'

Completing a brief for a negative response when the initial expression may have precluded my submission seems a waste of time

As a nominee I had very little time to prepare a well-considered proposal / application. A two-phase process would allow the expressions of interests, time to consider the project brief carefully and prepare well-thought out application.

All people worthy of this award are very busy. This year's requirement of completing a full proposal, given the amount of time required to do justice to the same, is totally unrealistic.

Feedback on Proposals  
Satisfaction

Very satisfied	√√√√√√√√√√
Satisfied	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
Not satisfied	√√√√√√√

### Selected Further Comment

Yes, as a successful applicant hearing the phrase, you've been successful was really enough. I was very impressed by the fact that I got a phone call for the project manager, Pauline – a letter is the very normal form. Pauline did talk about my application, which further boosted my ego, and also made a suggestion that I include overseas travel in my development plan.

My program would have benefited from more feedback and closer scrutiny – even though I would not have enjoyed that! I am so thankful I have been given this opportunity – perhaps near suicidal people should be targeted. I am given to understand that the FLL was a life saver in at least three cases. Says something about the system we are working in doesn't it! I found the Project Managers very encouraging and supportive, which is what I needed at the time.

Very positive feedback was received.

I was not aware of any feedback. I found out I was successful from my State Training Authority. My letter must have got lost in the post. I had no idea what was going on. I received an e-mail saying my submission had been received and was being considered. This was all for a month.

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I was an unsuccessful applicant and would have appreciated some feedback on why my application was not suitable.

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I must say how refreshing it is to receive honest feedback that provides tangible suggestions for improvement.

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I received a letter but did not follow up to see further feedback.

What feedback?

I heard nothing at all. This maybe because the response went to the organisation's Head Office. I was informed by the Head Office that the application was unsuccessful. There was no other feedback provided to me.

I was satisfied but not happy with the outcome given my experience and success as what I would see some one who has devoted many years to flexible learning options and systems.

Suggestions for Improvement

More individual attention, or a different group so that commonalities could be shared. I needed more help with the budget side of things.

Use of e-mail and telephone – everything I received was through snail mail.

As indicated I had no feedback. (A letter was received indicating not successful). On phoning I felt the proposal had not been read particularly well.

Give more information about whether the application met the selection criteria, if it was acceptable to the selection panel, was it to over the top or ambiguous – give examples of successful applications.

It could be offered.

Checklist of which parts of the proposal did/did not meet selection criteria – would provide a useful guide to possible re-submission in further rounds.

Send a copy of the feedback to the applicant as well as the nominating organisation. Offer constructive feedback to the applicant on the proposal. Also indicate whether with modification the proposal is likely to be supported in the future. I would have been very appreciative of such feedback.

I think also being provided with a list of successful proponents and copies of their proposals would be beneficial.

Other Issues

I am very grateful and thankful to have been selected. The criteria for selection were not clear to me, and I am just glad that I got in on the first round. My task is now to ensure that I get the most out of it for the next few months. And can find myself in a position to give as much back to the wider system as possible.

More attention must be given to ensuring that all potential candidates are made aware of the opportunity. Communication within Institutes cannot be relied upon.

A couple of questions were a bit ambiguous and repetitive, but I clarified them with Pauline and that was OK. I thought the whole process was straightforward, though too long between submission of application and winning it. I had to hold off on other projects just in case. A speedier process would have kept an anxiety levels down.

I felt there could have been more clarity on how much detail was required. I felt I missed out because of that.

It would have been good to have a person to contact later to discuss reasons why the application was unsuccessful.

Thank you for the support and assistance provided by the Project Managers

The impression that my initial enquiries to the FLL gained was that they were open to the proposal that could be used to apply my ACE sector experience in the VET sector. However, since the only feedback I received was that I had insufficient

ACE sector experience I feel that there was obviously a basic misunderstanding between my interpretation, the advice given and the selection process. It appears that the process is only designed for large providers within the VET sector. Surely it would lead to more creative, democratic and flexible learning leaders to make the program accessible to those working in flexible learning outside the VET sector.

The time span was too short, in order for a complete, or nearly completed development plan to be submitted more time was needed. When applicants must await responses from organisations for visits and courses. This played a significant role in my proposals and was, based on feedback received, the reason for rejection of the proposal. I'd like to know what others think in this regard. Also, I'd be keen to receive info / details on future calls for EOIs and submissions.

Perhaps unsuccessful candidates could be advised of further available rounds.

I commend programs such as these and look forward to future opportunities.

## SECTION B Successful Organisations ONLY

### Tender Information

#### Awareness

Newspaper Ad	√√√
ANTA Web Site	
Colleague or Network	√√√√√√√√√√√√
Other	√

#### Other

After presenting at a VET conference it was suggested by several people that I apply for this project based on the work / projects I have been involved in.

#### Project Brief

Post / Courier	
ANTA Web Site	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
Colleague or Network	√
Other	

#### Usefulness of Project Brief

Very Helpful	√√√√√√√√√√√√
Somewhat Helpful	√√√
Not Helpful	

#### Selected Further Comments

Requirements were well explained. Layout was good. Sample budgets were a god-send. Having a proforma to complete was very helpful. Improvements? A template for A Gantt chart would have been helpful (I had to create one from a Word table which slowed me down).

Gave ideas about what sort of project would be possible.

Inclusion of sample budgets was a good idea.

The examples were very good for getting an idea of the professional development program of the submission.

Succinct and easy to use

#### Organisational Assistance

None	√√√√√√
Some	√√√√√√√√
A lot	√

**Selected Further Comments**

I wrote the complete application. My manager, who is also my project sponsor, reviewed the application corrected some factual errors and made suggestions for improving the application.

Some discussion with workplace nominated mentor.

Both my direct manager and my general manager had significant roles in the development of the submission. A desktop publisher was made available to format the document.

Other than to approve submission prior to sending it.

**Selection Process**

How long did you take to prepare your proposal?

Between 0 and 8 person hours	√√
Between 8 and 16 person hours	√√√√√√√√
Between 16 and 24 person hours	√√
Greater than 24 person hours	√√

**Support for a two-step process**

Yes	√√√√√√√√√√√√
No	√√

**Selected Further Comment**

The full application requires a substantial effort. Furthermore, it requires two references and a letter of support for the project sponsor. If the project sponsor is not a senior executive then an additional letter of support is required. Negotiating for these references and letters of support is very time consuming, instils some level of obligation and uses other people's valuable time. This should only be called on if there is a very high level of success. Likewise, the applicant should not only be required to put in effort to do the full application if there is a high probability of success.

There can be a lot of work done, and with the possibility of embarrassment if applicant is not successful. Would be better to provide some support to ensure people put together a worthwhile program once they have been selected. Basis of selection???? Personal need? Organisational need? Compared with the Travelling scholarships, where people need to have every detail signed up beforehand – leaving people looking silly and having raised other people's expectations if they do not get accepted.

This would have been more efficient, particularly for those who eventually may not have been selected.

It takes a lot of time writing the proposal without having to go back over it again. An FLL should be clear about what they want to do – otherwise, they are not ready to apply.

Because these submissions take a lot of time to prepare especially as the requirement is to seek references for various people / organisations.

Less time and effort involved until more likelihood of success.

**Feedback on Proposals**

**Satisfaction**

Very satisfied	√√√√√√
Satisfied	√√√√√√
Not satisfied	√

**Selected Further Comment**

Yes, as a successful applicant hearing the phrase, you've been successful was really enough. I was very impressed by the fact that I got a phone call for the project manager, Pauline – a letter is the very normal form. Pauline did talk about my application, which further boosted my ego, and also made a suggestion that I include overseas travel in my development plan.

My program would have benefited from more feedback and closer scrutiny – even though I would not have enjoyed that! I am so thankful I have been given this opportunity – perhaps near suicidal people should be targeted. I am given to understand that the FLL was a life saver in at least three cases. Says something about the system we are working in doesn't it! I found the Project Managers very encouraging and supportive, which is what I needed at the time.

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Suggestions for Improvement

More individual attention, or a different group so that commonalities could be shared. I needed more help with the budget side of things.

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Other Issues

I am very grateful and thankful to have been selected. The criteria for selection were not clear to me, and I am just glad that I got in on the first round. My task is now to ensure that I get the most out of it for the next few months. And can find myself in a position to give as much back to the wider system as possible.

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## SECTION C Unsuccessful Proposers ONLY

### Tender Information

#### Awareness

Newspaper Ad	√√√√
ANTA Web Site	√√√
Colleague or Network	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
Other	

#### Project Brief

Post / Courier	√
ANTA Web Site	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
Colleague or Network	
Other	

#### Usefulness of Project Brief

Very Helpful	√√√√
Somewhat Helpful	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
Not Helpful	√

#### Selected Further Comments

It provided guidelines but by the time I knew about it, time was limited. Nevertheless the Project Brief was all I had to go on.

Even with a Project Brief, I always have to make contact with the National Project Manager to ensure nothing has been left out and needs to be expanded on.

It was not clear to me what the target group is for the program.

It did not give enough detail on the breath of acceptable projects nor the outcomes.

The issue of accessibility arises: access to the project management was limited, particularly at key times when preparing the proposal. Clarification is then needed, which could be provided in advance. The examples or case studies could be improved.

The brief outlined very clearly what the aims and objectives and requirements were.

I had to refer this to my manager – perhaps she could say how helpful she found it.

Considering I needed to obtain corporate support and approval to propose, the information was not clear and lead time from obtaining the approval, considering other workloads was inappropriate.

It was succinct and easy to use in comparison with other ANTA applications.

Organisational Assistance

None	√√√√√
Some	√√√√√√√√√√
A lot	√√√

**Selected Further Comments**

A colleague helped me with some of the application.

Worked as a team including Ass Director / Admin support and college manager to prepare submission over several full days.

Support was obtained through brainstorming sessions with colleagues.

Needed to gain Management support for the proposal and to link the application to the Institute's Strategic Directions.

Not relevant to a small organisation. In fact the Flexible Learning Leaders program does not seem to be designed for small organisations.

While the organisation supported the concept, only advice was provided, as assistance was not really available due to 'workloads' etc.

Assistant director provided feedback on my draft and wrote a letter of support. Director wrote a letter of support.

They provided me with information; admin support and senior management very generous with their time in helping me shape my proposal

Supporting documentation only

Strong encouragement. The organisation nominated me. The organisation was keen for my involvement and offered considerable support once the project got underway. With an unsuccessful application / proposal – the organisation has not had the opportunity to provide support.

**Selection Process**

How long did you take to prepare your proposal?

Between 0 and 8 person hours	√√√
Between 8 and 16 person hours	√√√√√√√√√√
Between 16 and 24 person hours	√√
Greater than 24 person hours	√√√

**Support for a two-step process**

Yes	√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√√
No	

**Selected Further Comment**

I felt the hours spent developing the proposal were 'wasted'. A more streamlined selection process would be more beneficial as it would respect applicant's time and effort substantially.

Tender applications can come at any time and the work is always extra to the normal (very full) workload so a two-staged selection process would allow better time management. Also, there would be more incentive to submit a full proposal once shortlisted.

Would save people wasting time in preparing a full application if initial concept was not acceptable.

This is an excellent idea – it would confirm that the selection criteria and ideas were in line with the objectives of the program.

Possible as well to provide guidance to refine proposals. I believe this approach could also benefit the selection panel.

I believe it would help remove any confusion.

An information sessions where applicants could have questions answered would also be helpful. A shortlist / expression of interest would mean less time wasted.

Yes, however this would likely become problematic. The nature of the criteria to be addressed would need to be conducive to short, succinct responses.

I think it would minimise the time and workload spent on researching the detail of the proposed plan.

Brief outline on the core aspects of the project are easy to summarise with fleshing out of details to come later. It also gives selectors more time to gain additional feedback as to the key aspects.

Saves wasted effort if the proposal is not "in the ball park"

Completing a brief for a negative response when the initial expression may have precluded my submission seems a waste of time

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#### Feedback on Proposals

##### Satisfaction

Very satisfied	√√√√
Satisfied	√√√√√√√√
Not satisfied	√√√√√√√√

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