



Quality Part-Time Work in Local Government

Assisting with work and family balance

An effective solution to balancing work and family creates a productive workplace, as well as a rewarding family life.

Today's workplace must respond to a changing labour force, the need for increased workplace flexibility and the importance of a skilled and engaged workforce.

Quality part-time work is about attracting and retaining skilled workers who have family responsibilities. Putting quality part-time work firmly on the agenda is one step towards an effective response to contemporary needs and demands.

The information set out below is designed to encourage organisations to consider quality part-time work to assist with the balance between family and work.

Women returning from maternity leave and others whose family requirements mean that working part-time is a short or long term strategy to assist the balance between family and work may benefit from quality part-time work.

However, quality part-time work is not just for people with family responsibilities. It can assist staff combine work with study or other life pursuits or can be used to assist in graduated retirement.

We encourage you to think about the information within these guidelines and to use it to assist your staff with balancing work, family and other life matters.

Putting quality part-time work in place is good for everyone.



This guideline has been developed by Industrial Relations Victoria in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria, Local Government Professionals Inc. and the Australian Services Union (Victorian Authorities and Services Branch). The guideline provides information to local government managers about how to put in place quality part-time work arrangements to assist staff who have family responsibilities. It is not meant to be prescriptive. The ideas and industry examples are meant to stimulate interest in and commitment to quality part-time work.



Part-time work in the local government sector

"It's really all about matching the needs of our staff with the service requirements of our customers. Through putting in place quality part-time work, we're retaining staff who might have previously left our employment and we're also becoming a more attractive place to work. This is particularly important for us as a rural council, as we're attracting staff back into our community." Greg Jakob, Director of Corporate Services, Moorabool Shire Council

The key to success in local government is matching the needs of staff with the service requirements of the community. And peaks and troughs in service demand mean that the need for staff changes over the work day and work week.

Part-time staff are vitally important in covering these peaks and troughs. And many staff, particularly those with family responsibilities, appreciate being able to work less than full-time hours.

Part-time work is here to stay and in local government, part-time staff are critical to meeting service needs. They must be taken seriously. Many want a career in local government and will move around to find a good employer.

Good jobs, whether part-time or full-time, attract good people.

And while there is a lot of part-time work in local government, much of it may not be quality part-time work.

What makes for a quality part-time job in local government?

While each Council and each job is different, the one thing that does distinguish *quality* part-time jobs from other part-time jobs is that people doing them are seen as *part of the regular workforce*.

Quality part-time work at the City of Port Phillip

At the City of Port Phillip, the focus is on meeting the flexibility and diversity of local government service needs. Quality part-time work meets the need for staff to provide high quality services to the community. Many part-time workers are employed in providing home care services, respite care, call centre, front desk services and library services directly to people out in the community.

Senior staff also opt to work part-time. The Manager, Governance & External Relations, the Senior Corporate Accountant, the Risk Management Coordinator, Senior Strategic Planner, Coordinator Social Planning and Coordinator Corporate Planning are just some examples of managers working part-time.

Danielle Rose, Manager Organisation Development, explains, "At the City of Port Phillip we recognise that quality part-time work is not only about providing a flexible environment that suits the needs of the employee and the organisation but it's also important in serving the community. It is about caring for ourselves, caring for each other and caring for this place."

Myths about quality part-time work in local government

There are lots of views about part-time work – many of these have no basis in fact. Here are just a few that might apply to the local government sector:

- **Staff who work part-time aren't interested in getting ahead**
People who work part-time are like everyone else. Some will want to move ahead in their careers and others will not. There should be no disadvantage in working part-time. Make sure you don't assume people who are working part-time aren't interested in promotion – either to a full-time position or a part-time position. And certainly don't assume that their experience and commitment are less than those of full-timers. Give them an equal chance.
- **Managers can't be part-time**
Quality part-time work should be available to all employees, except where genuine job requirements make this unreasonable. With supervisors or managers, a job-share arrangement might make good sense, or perhaps jobs could be redesigned to accommodate part-time work in local government.
- **Once one person works part-time, everyone will want to**
Staff who work part-time earn less than those who work full-time. Most people will not want the loss of income that part-time work brings, nor the possible impact on their career plans. Not everyone in the organisation will want to work part-time.
- **Only women want to work part-time for family responsibilities**
Men have family responsibilities too. And there are men working in local government who might also choose to reduce their hours to help with family care responsibilities.
- **Part-time work is very hard to set up and manage**
Quality part-time work is all about fairness, transparency and consistency. See below for some steps to ensure success.

Use the following checklist to see if the part-time jobs in your organisation are quality jobs.

The quality part-time work checklist

- Our organisation gives both men and women the opportunity to work part-time.** Depending on organisational requirements, people can work part-time across all the areas of Council.
What sets organisations with quality part-time work apart from others is that part-time work is found throughout the organisation and both men and women work part-time. In local government this is certainly possible. Remember that if part-time jobs are only available at the base grade level – experienced women who choose to return to work part-time after maternity leave, will not want to work for you.

- ✔ **People who work part-time in our organisation have the same protections as the full-time workforce, including job protection and predictability of hours.**

Job security and predictable work hours are particularly important to people with family responsibilities; for example, those with children in child care may need to fit their work around the child care centre hours.

- ✔ **People who work part-time receive pro-rata wages and access to benefits.**

This includes any benefits full-time employees doing the same job might accrue such as holiday and sick leave, salary bonuses and access to other job-related benefits.

- ✔ **People who work part-time have their work load adjusted to the hours they work.**

A balance between work and the other things in life is important to everyone. Employing someone part-time doesn't mean having a part-time worker doing a full-time job.

- ✔ **People who work part-time in our organisation are encouraged to participate in training and can apply for promotion if they wish. They will be genuinely considered.**

Quality part-time work means equal access to training and promotion. Employees who work part-time bring a full set of skills to the workplace. Organisations that are serious about quality part-time work do not assume part-time workers do not want to add to their skills or move ahead in their careers.

- ✔ **People can move between full-time and part-time work as they require.**

While the option to move between full-time and part-time work will depend upon service and job requirements, the option should be there. For people with family responsibilities, the need to work part-time changes across the life course. For example, when babies are small, parents may wish to work part-time, but as children go to school, longer hours might be preferred.

- ✔ **Part-time employees are treated the same as those who are full-time.**

In organisations with quality part-time work in place, managers and other work colleagues see part-time workers as valuable contributors. Their work is challenging, meaningful and satisfying – not just the bits and pieces or the shifts that no one else wants.

- ✔ **We recognise that employees have a life outside work.**

Better balance between work and other things in life, including family, is important for everyone. A growing number of women in the paid workforce and an ageing population mean most people will have child care or elder care responsibilities for at least a part of their working lives.

The advantages of quality part-time work in local government

“At the City of Melbourne, we recognise the benefits of promoting a healthy work–life balance to attract and retain high calibre staff. Wherever possible, we look towards supporting employees achieve greater flexibility in their work, which usually means

reducing hours to a part-time arrangement. This will ultimately benefit both employees and the organisation.” Mike Dawson-Smith, Manager Human Resources, City of Melbourne.

The ability to recruit and retain experienced and skilled staff

The big advantage of quality part-time work is that it helps to retain experienced and skilled staff who may not wish to work full-time at particular stages in their lives. Staff returning from parental leave might return to work earlier if opportunities for quality part-time work are available, while those nearing retirement may continue in the workforce if they can cut back their hours.

Increased morale, productivity and efficiency

Morale, productivity and efficiency increase when staff know their employer has invested in them. And that's got to be good for the organisation. Putting quality part-time work in place can help reduce employee stress and unplanned absenteeism.

Becoming an employer of choice

Organisations can benefit from being known in the community as family friendly. This could mean attracting better employees and an enhanced reputation within your community.

Quality part-time work at the Shire of Yarra Ranges

The Shire of Yarra Ranges is committed to the provision of quality part-time work as it enables employees to remain at work or return to work when their personal circumstances change. The Shire also benefits from the retention of knowledge and experience of our valued employees. At the Shire of Yarra Ranges over recent years part-time work has been utilised by:

- *parents returning to work after the birth of a child;*
- *parents returning to the workforce when their children commence school;*
- *workers needing to care for older dependents;*
- *older workers preparing for retirement; and*
- *workers returning to part-time study*

Heather McIntyre, Manager, Human Resources, Shire of Yarra Ranges

It's also about risk management!

Both Federal and State legislation promote equal opportunity in the workplace and outlaw discrimination on the grounds of parental or carer status or family responsibilities. Reasonable accommodation of employee requests for flexible work arrangements to assist them balance their work and family responsibilities is important where this is possible.

This does not mean that employers have to agree to every request for part-time work. However, it does mean that before making a final decision, you should seriously consider requests case-by-case in the light of genuine work requirements, and creatively explore how the job could be performed under alternative work arrangements.

So what do I do when someone asks to work part-time to accommodate family responsibilities?

The real key to success in quality part-time work is open communication between staff and management.

Be prepared

Every request for part-time work will be different. If you already know the steps you will take to consider a request, the process will be clear and consistent. Consider developing a written policy, including the steps you take in considering a request. This could speed up decisions and help ensure consistency and transparency.

Suggest the employee develop a formal proposal

Before you meet to consider a request, ask the staff member concerned to write down what they want to achieve by working part-time, the impact this might have on those they work with and what it might mean for the job they do and for the organisation.

Consider each request objectively and sensitively

Seriously consider each request. Be flexible and creative. There are not many jobs in local government that could not be adapted to part-time work. Think about and plan for how the part-time work arrangement might be best managed. Make sure you think through and plan for the reduction in the employee's work load, as well as any impact on the work of colleagues and on service requirements. If it is not possible to meet the request for part-time work, consider other flexible work options that could assist employees to balance work and family responsibilities.

Write down what has been agreed

Agree in writing to a regular pattern of work and include the length of time the arrangement will be in place, as well as the dates for regular review. And remember, if you turn down a request from someone who wants to work part-time to assist with family responsibilities, explain your reasons in writing, giving clear business reasons.

Ensure part-time employees are part of the regular workforce

Include part-time employees in all communication, consultation processes and social activities. As far as possible ensure that any training or staff meetings are scheduled when part-time staff can attend. Put in place a planned process to ensure that work colleagues are aware of changes to work hours and have a plan of action to deal with any problems should these arise.

Monitor part-time work arrangements

Make a time for regular review of the part-time work arrangement to make sure it is working for everyone – if there are any doubts about whether it will work consider putting the arrangement in place for a trial period.

The City of Melbourne and quality part-time work

The City of Melbourne's policy on flexible working arrangements includes a requirement that the employee outline the business case, including how the proposed arrangement will affect:

- *the maintenance or improvement of the team's ability to meet customer service and performance standards;*
- *the maintenance of communication within the team;*
- *the impact on internal and external customers, co-workers, manager/team leader and/or others;*
- *how the changes requested will affect the ability to meet work goals/objectives;*
- *the assessment of performance against expectations;*
- *the integration of training and development sessions into the flexible schedule;*
- *the potential implications for the branch's budget e.g. the need for additional equipment and any other costs associated with the request and, if any, the cost-benefit to the business.*

Right to Request and the Family Provisions Test Case

In August 2005 the Australian Industrial Relations Commission handed down its decision in the Family Provisions Test Case. One of the relevant provisions is an employee's 'right to request' a return from parental leave on a part-time basis until a child reaches school age to assist an employee reconcile work and parental responsibilities. An employer will need to consider such a request having regard to the employee's circumstances, provided it is genuinely based on the employee's parental responsibilities. The 'right to request' also means that an employer has a right to refuse the request but only on reasonable grounds related to the effect on the workplace or the employer's business such as cost, lack of adequate replacement staff, loss of efficiency and the impact on customer service.

For Further Information

For more information, go to the Industrial Relations Victoria website at www.irv.vic.gov.au
Industrial Relations Victoria Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development