

Benefiting from the Business Link Service

Initial Guidance for Partners developing ERDF proposals

2007-2013

Introduction

The East Midlands ERDF Programme 2007-2013 references the Government's Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP). A key element of BSSP is that Business Link will be the primary access channel for all publicly business support. In order to comply with this element of BSSP any proposal that is aimed at supporting businesses must clearly show how the planned activity will be engaged with Business Link and use the service to best effect.

The purpose of this paper is to provide initial guidance to partners wishing to develop proposals for ERDF funding to explain:

- What Business Link does and the customer journey.
- How Business Link should be incorporated into proposals for business support under each ERDF priority.

This initial guidance will be subject to review as the ERDF programme progresses.

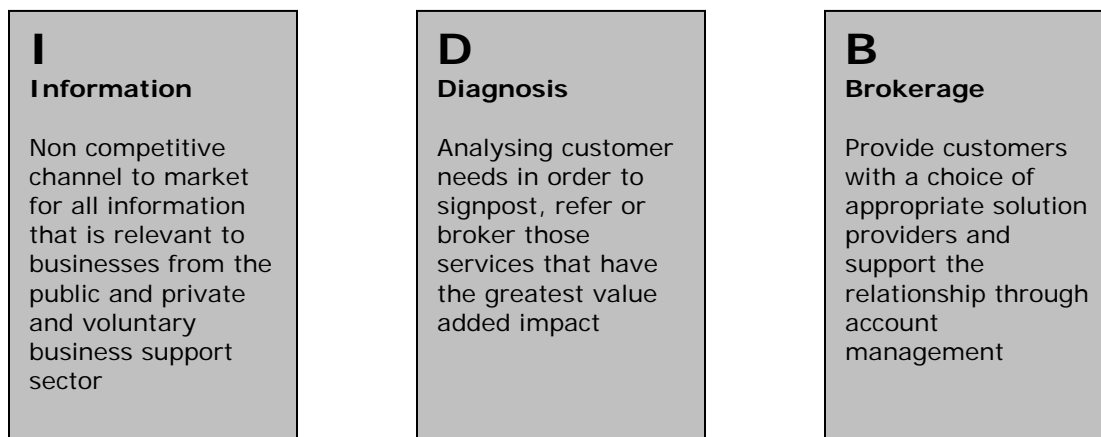
The Role of Business Link

Business Link is a nationally branded service offering independent, impartial and insightful access to appropriate business support through third party suppliers. Business Link delivery consists of Information, Diagnosis and Brokerage.

Providing the Regional Business Link Service

This section describes the Business Link service, the East Midlands approach to delivery of IDB, the detail behind the customer journey and how this is supported from an organisational perspective.

The Service Offer



The IDB process encourages customers to engage in productive change through the help of third party business support services, in effect creating and growing a new market for business services.

Business Link promotes a wide range of support available to both businesses and actual or potential entrepreneurs. This is done through a wide range of channels including the businesslink.gov website, targeted e-news letters, PR and marketing in local media, awareness sessions, attendance at business to business networking events and providing answers to queries using the knowledge bank platform within the Regional Business Support Information System, (RBSIS).

The Business Link diagnostic process actively engages customers in identifying new markets or product opportunities and highlighting any deficit in their business strategy or resources and builds awareness amongst business owners of the depth and range of support services available at national and local level. These include voluntary, public and private suppliers and other government departments' business support initiatives.

Whilst most Business Link customer's supplier needs can be met through a light touch diagnostic and information many require more in-depth diagnostic and brokerage from the quality assured list of suppliers in the Brokerage platform within the RBSIS. There are currently over 3,000 quality assured suppliers from a wide range of sectors and specialisms.

The experience of each customer is driven by clarity, consistency and efficiency, achieved by working in a clearly defined system capable of flexibility at all stages

Business Link Delivery in the East Midlands

The primary Business Link Provider, (BLP) in the East Midlands is East Midlands Business Limited (EMB). In addition to delivering the main awareness raising and marketing channel activities, EMB also undertake most of the "face to face" work with customers through advisers 'on the ground' and provide the Enquiry Hub through the regional 0845 058 6644 number. EMB also manage other providers of the Business Link service in the region including Land Based Businesses and the E-Business Programme.

The Business Link Start-Up Service

The Business Link Start-up Service, (BLSS), delivers business start-up advice, training and mentoring to enable the creation of sustainable new businesses in the East Midlands. Anyone in the region thinking of developing and starting a business, and those running a new-start business in the first 12 months of trading can access the service.

A key aim of the BLSS is to stimulate an enterprise culture by raising aspirations among students, individuals in disadvantaged areas and those in socially excluded groups, as well as individuals currently in employment and potential spin outs from business and universities.

The 2007 – 2013 ERDF programme is an important opportunity for Business Link to engage through a more community focussed route with hard to reach communities and groups who have previously not engaged or been aware of Business Link services, in

order to encourage and support them in the creation and further development of their new businesses. A major element of BLSS activity in the ERDF Priority Action 2 areas is designed to help with the process of raising awareness and aspirations at the grass-roots level. In that respect the BLSS programme is an enabling project designed to get the best from what already exists, as well as identifying new elements of pre-start and start-up support that should also be included.

The four BLSS providers for the region are: Nottinghamshire Business Venture (NBV), Derbyshire Enterprise Agency, (DEA), The University of Northampton, (TUON), and Skills for Enterprise, (SFE).

Regional Business Support Information System (RBSIS)

To support the Business Link service across the East Midlands *emda* developed the RBSIS to record client details, interventions and outcomes. RBSIS is far more, however, than just a Client Relationship Management (CRM) system – it enables the promotion of business support, managing events, co-ordinating publicly funded support from the Learning and Skills Council, (LSC), and United Kingdom Trade and Investment, (UKTI), as well as Business Link, replacing five separate systems in use around the region prior to April 2007.

The system:

- Stores details for business contacts and companies in the region
- Records details of business support interactions with individuals and businesses
- Ensures that contacts are followed up
- Provides access to an impartial, high quality Service Provider Register via a Brokerage mechanism
- Provides a single repository of information on both public and private sector business support across the region and nationally
- Generates the MI and ad-hoc metrics by which *emda* and partners can monitor and measure success

The system is entirely web based and this means that no great IT infrastructure needs to be supplied by potential system users. If the user has a decent laptop or PC and access to Broadband, then they can access RBSIS.

The main elements of RBSIS are:

The CRM

The CRM is the main record of company, contact and interaction details. Access to the CRM controls access to the rest of RBSIS.

Service Provider Register

The Service Provider Register (SPR) consists of business and skills solution providers operating within the East Midlands. Basic registration on the register providing information on the supplier and contact details is available for all suppliers. Suppliers undertaking the quality assurance checks are eligible to be put forward for projects attracting public support such as the Business Transformation Grant, (BTG). A supplier's position as a quality assured supplier is constantly updated through a client

feedback system ensuring only effective service providers are used for publicly-funded business support projects.

Knowledge Bank

The Knowledge Bank provides access to relevant information from a wide range of sources and ensures consistency in the information provided to clients. The content of the Knowledge Bank is managed on behalf of *emda* by an external knowledge management specialist contractor that ensures only accurate, high-quality information is provided to clients.

Management Information

A reporting portal enables RBSIS data to be provided to users as regular standard management reports or on an ad-hoc report generation basis.

Engagement Levels

A Customer will engage with Business Link at many different levels during its developmental journey. There are three primary levels of engagement defined below and the Customer Journeys for each of these levels appears at the end of this document. You will need to demonstrate within your proposal how you plan to engage with the customer journey in practice.

These guidance notes will then help you to work through the questions you will need to consider when developing a proposal.

Detailed arrangements within each programme will vary depending on the nature of the service to be delivered however a number of key questions that should be addressed within each proposal are outlined in the table on page XX.

Level 1 is basic information provision which is activity supported by the Knowledge Bank and Service Provider Register elements of the Regional Business Support Information System (RBSIS). This service is usually delivered through the Regional enquiry 'Hub'

The Enquiry Hub provides an intelligent front line service ensuring a swift and professional response regardless of the communication channel used by the customer.

Level 2 engagements are delivered through events and workshops.

Level 3 engagements are delivered by Business Support Advisers, either working face to face or via the phone or email. Advisers have to be flexible, able to deliver a light touch one to one service at one extreme and the intensive support required for those businesses capable of growth or facing significant change in their operating environment at the opposite end of the spectrum therefore the duration of a level 3 engagement will vary considerably and may take place over several weeks or even months.

Delivery Principles

The following principles should apply to any business support service developed using ERDF funding:

- Business Link is normally the first point of access for business support.
- A general diagnosis from Business Link should precede specialist interventions.
- The customer's needs should be verified at the first point of entry.
- The customer is able to access the most appropriate source of support irrespective of where they initially go to access help.
- The customer should only need to provide a piece of information once.

Next Steps

emda and Business Link will be visiting each district over the coming weeks through a series of workshops and clinics after the Expression of Interest stage to ensure that partners develop a clear understanding before the Business Plan stage. In the meantime if you have any questions please contact:

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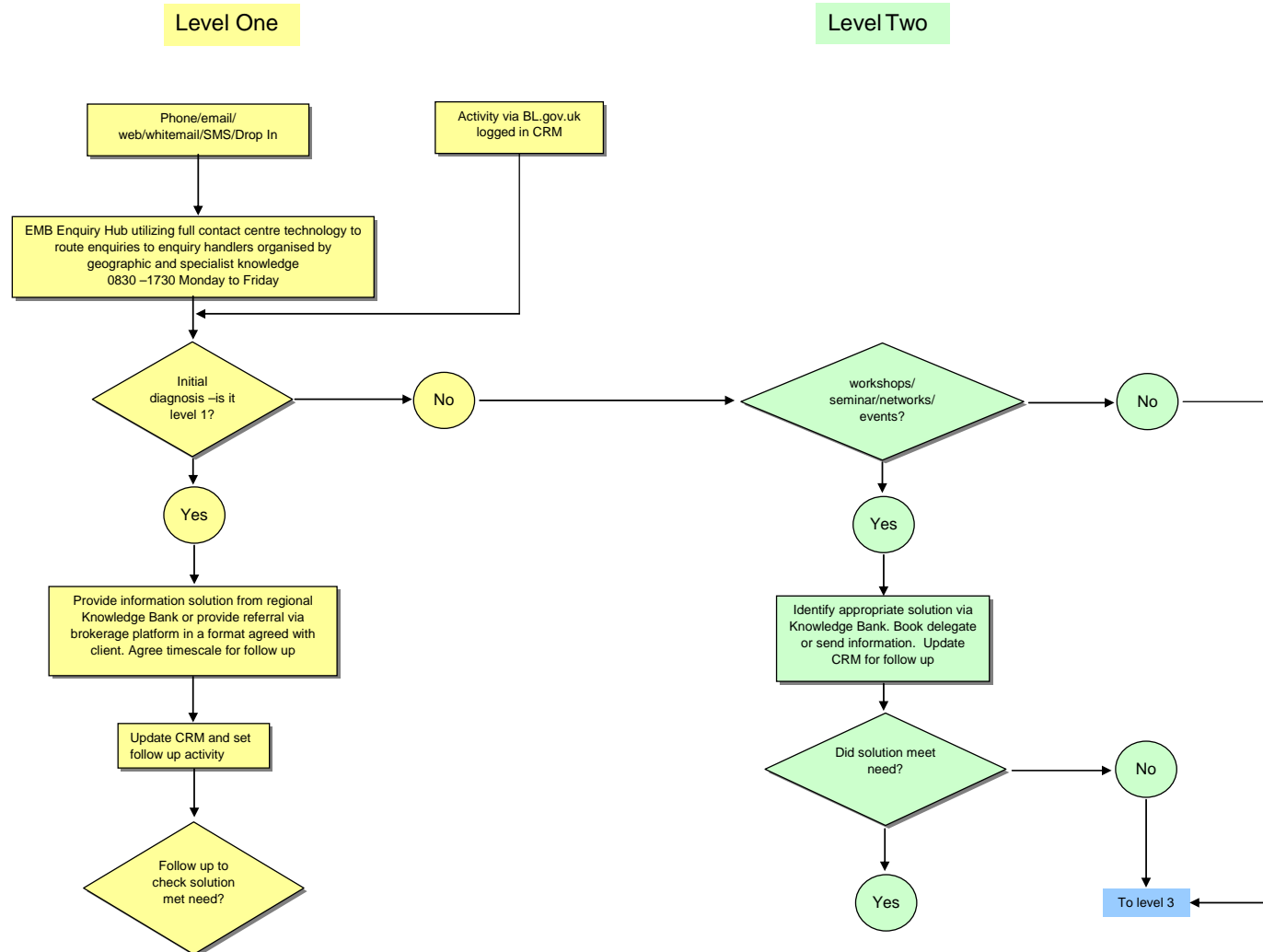
Key Questions:

The following table contains a number of questions that must be addressed in all ERDF funding proposals that seek to provide support to businesses. This is not an exhaustive list and is intended to stimulate your thought process in terms of the customer journey, branding, marketing, access, diagnosis and working in partnership.

	Key Questions
Customer Journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the service provided by your project fit with the Business Link customer journey?• How will potential customers be identified if not through the Business Link gateway?• Does your project's activities fit with Business Support Simplification proposals?
Brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What branding do you intend to use and how will this be used in relation to the Business Link brand?

Marketing and Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you make best use of Business Link’s marketing, awareness raising and promotional activity? • How will your marketing activities complement mainstream Business Link marketing activities? • How will you ensure that your approach to marketing minimises customer confusion? • How will marketing materials be developed and used? • What will be your main marketing channels? • What materials will you develop and how will these be branded? • How will you ensure that marketing activity is coordinated with other providers working with your target group? • Does your approach fit with Business Support Simplification proposals?
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the Business Link phone number / website to be used on promotional materials? If not – why not? • How will you ensure that your customers are able to access the full range of business support services available? • Does your target audience have any particular access requirements?
Specialist Diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a need for a more in-depth, specialist diagnosis in order to design the solution for a particular business? Will this require technical skills / expertise?
Referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you ensure that Business Link is aware of developments in your services? • How will you ensure that effective referrals are made to and from Business Link? • How will you ensure that your workforce is aware of the Business Link service and enable them to make effective referrals to it?

The Customer Journey (Levels 1 and 2):



The Customer Journey (Level 3):

