

Invitation to Tender

Peer Network Programme

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1. Background

Growth Platform is Liverpool City Region's economic enabler, designed to support people and businesses to realise their potential and generate growth. It has been established by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Combined Authority to simplify and strengthen the City Region's business support landscape and help deliver the City Region's business growth and investment priorities, working in partnership with business, government departments, our Local Authorities, Chambers, Universities, Colleges and Third sector partners.

In the light of the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the immense challenges it has presented to business, Growth Platform is directing much of its resource to support businesses and partner organisations during this period.

www.growthplatform.org

2. Overview

Peer Networks is a national initiative that is delivered locally through the LEP network and their respective Growth Hubs. The programme's longer-term aims are focused on reducing the UK productivity gap by helping business leaders find practical solutions to strategic and operational challenges. It also forms part of the UK Government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing EU transition, seeking to improve the resilience of SMEs, their capability to adapt their business models to the "new normal" and position themselves for future success, driving longer-term productivity gains.

The Programme forms an important part of the Government's drive to improve productivity and deliver part of the economic response to the effect of COVID-19 on businesses. It will provide support to SMEs as they move into and through the Recovery phase of COVID-19 response. The aim is to improve SME's capability to adapt their business models to the "new normal", position themselves for future success and drive longer term productivity gains through improved leadership and management skills and tech adoption.

The desire is to target 6,000 participants nationally in 2021-2022, which will be spread across 38 LEPs in line with local demand and capacity to deliver.

The programme sees the creation of a series of Peer Networks (cohorts) through the Growth Hub network. Each cohort is expected to consist of 11 owners or managers from the Liverpool City Region (LCR) SME business community. Led by an experienced facilitator, these Peer Networks will typically meet fortnightly as part of delivering 18 hours of action learning through online, and potentially face to face sessions.

In addition, each business will receive 3.5 hours of individual one-to-one support (coaching, mentoring, or advice) to be provided either directly by the programme, or from other existing schemes to help to implement and manage change.

Active involvement in the Peer Network will enhance the leadership capabilities, knowledge and confidence of business owners and entrepreneurs within a local region. It will help build regional connectivity and strength within the SME business community.

The Peer Networks Programme is funded by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in response to a commitment made in the 2019 Business Productivity Review.

3. Requirements

Growth Platform wish to procure a number of suppliers to facilitate the Peer Networks cohorts. In total we wish to procure the delivery of a minimum of 14 cohorts comprising of 11 participants with each supplier bidding for a maximum of 2 cohorts.

The programme runs for 12 months and we anticipate an initial intake of participants and cohorts launched in May/June and again in September/October, with all group sessions having been delivered by end February 2022.

Whilst we want full geographical and sector coverage of all businesses in the LCR we would welcome submissions that target priority groups of businesses:

Priority groups:

- Priority Sectors including but not limited to Manufacturing, Automotive, Health & Life Science, Visitor Economy, Creative, Digital and tech led businesses.
- High Growth female led businesses
- High Growth BAME led businesses
- High Growth businesses

We expect to deliver a combination of mixed/general cohorts and specific cohorts focussing on for example, although not limited to geography, sector, business size, female led businesses, BAME led businesses and high growth businesses.

The programme requires an increase in participation from business leaders from underrepresented groups who are female, BAME, disabled.

Growth Platform are committed to widening diversity and participation from marginalised and underrepresented groups and particularly welcomes suppliers who will engage with and recruit participants from the aforementioned groups

Successful suppliers will need to understand the business support landscape within the region to ensure that the service provided will complement and add value to the support currently available within the region to help SMEs. Suppliers are expected to provide all platforms, premises, equipment and materials required for the delivery of the programme, unless agreed in advance through specific arrangements.

The programme will be supported by a playbook – a user handbook to aid the successful roll-out and implementation of the programme. It aims to provide a common resource to support local delivery partners and will help ensure there is a suitable level of national consistency in how the programme is delivered, whilst allowing for a degree of local flexibility as appropriate.

Alongside local marketing through Growthplatform.org, there will also be a Government 'national landing page' where businesses can register their interest and standardised set of metrics that need to be collected throughout the programme. This will be shared with the successful party upon contract commencement.

The contract is split into 2 components, 1. Programme Mobilisation and Programme Management and 2. Delivery. Suppliers must be able to demonstrate ability in both areas.

Programme Mobilisation and Programme Management

Management:

- robust marketing plans and application process for recruiting appropriate businesses/participants
- robust model for meeting contracted targets
- robust model to ensure no 'drop out' of engaged businesses
- robust model for undertaking the 'change in attitudes' survey of businesses supported on the programme
- meeting programme quality assurance requirements to be set out in a quality assurance framework
- commitment to undertake monthly reporting, including using a programme microsite for network KPI capture

Target SME profile:

The criteria are to target firms that will most benefit and have the most to contribute to others, in particular SME leaders:

- whose business has been in operation long enough for challenges to materialise
- managing the challenges associated with a sizeable team of permanent staff
- who are motivated to learn from others and improve their business
- Essential Criteria:
 - A turnover of at least £100,000
 - At least 5 employees*
 - Operating for 1 year +
 - Have not previously participated in the Peer Networks programme
 - An aspiration to improve
 - Business must have a trading address within Liverpool City Region (Liverpool, Knowsley, Halton, Sefton, St Helen's, Wirral).
- Desirable:
 - High growth businesses that have the potential to scale up
 - Exporters and potential exporters?
 - Businesses that have not previously accessed business support
 - Businesses that have not participated in the Peer Networks Programme
 - Medium sized businesses

*Each cohort may contain one business with less than 5 employees

*For creative industry businesses the minimum number of employees can include Associates.

Recruitment of SMEs:

Suppliers will be responsible for the recruitment of participants to the programme. The supplier will need to carefully consider who is recruited to minimise participant drop out. Businesses will also be referred to suppliers via the Local Growth Hubs, but these will need to be assessed for suitability by the supplier.

Success will be measured by:

- Firm survival
- Growth in value added as an indicator of recovery from COVID-19
- Improvements in labour productivity
- Participant views on the resilience of their SME
- Participant views on their leadership and management skills
- The SME's ability to recruit and retain staff where appropriate
- The SME's ability to access cash to continue trading
- Changes in the SME's adoption of technology

Programme Delivery

The successful suppliers will be expected to deliver against the playbook. In summary, the delivery model is:

- **Target cohort size:** 11 business owners or senior decision makers per cohort.
- **Number of sessions:** Led by an experienced facilitator using the action learning methodology, the number of sessions will be determined by local needs. Each cohort must meet for a total of 18 hours.
- **Frequency of sessions:** Led by an experienced facilitator using the action learning methodology, the frequency of sessions will be determined by local needs. Each cohort must meet for a total of 18 hours.

Location: Given current social distancing restrictions and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the sessions will be delivered virtually initially . As restrictions and guidance are changed Growth Platform will consider face-to-face delivery where there is a demand for this style.

- **Topic Selection:**
Topics could include but are not limited to:
 - Finance
 - HR
 - Sales and Marketing
 - Adjusting to social distancing
 - Business Model Innovation
 - Change Management
 - Embedding formal management processes and systems
 - Digital (including adoption and implementation of technology, cyber security)
 - Use of data to drive value in the business
 - Post EU transition
 - Net zero
- **Methodology:** Each session must be facilitated according to action learning principals

Action Learning

Action learning is an approach to problem solving and learning in groups to bring about change in individuals, teams, organisations and systems. It is based on the principle that the most effective learning takes place in the context in which people are working. A Peer Network is a private group of invited business leaders, formed to support its participants by working together to share challenges, solutions, knowledge, expertise and experience.

Typically:

- Participants gather on a regular basis with the support of a facilitator to explore individual participants' challenge and to co-operate by sharing learning from each other's successes, setbacks and practices.
- The point is to realise opportunities, overcome challenges, develop themselves and their businesses.
- The conversation is structured and facilitated using action learning principles to ensure consistency, efficiency and effectiveness, leading to specific actions self-directed by participants.
- Participants reflect on the feedback and discussion and act on new thinking following the session, reporting the results back to their co-members the next time they meet. This helps everyone move forward on their challenges and learn from each other's progress. The fact that participants always report back to the group helps everyone hold each other to account for progressing with their issues and opportunities.
- The process is designed to deliver new insights for participant and result in tangible actions or solutions.

For the Peer Networks programme participants will benefit from both access to a professional action learning facilitator and one-to-one support outside of the group sessions. Importantly, the content of the sessions should be driven by the participants from a list of key themes (e.g. business development, marketing, people management, technology adoption, response to COVID-19, EU transition) and should be tailored to focus on their specific needs, including wider issues that may be affecting their sector, locality or business model.

Each of the sessions must be led by an experienced facilitator utilising the action learning methodology. This is a highly effective way of running Peer Networks and provides a common framework to ensure national consistency across all the local groups. The facilitator will lead and host the sessions (using video conference platforms such as MS Teams, WebEx, Zoom, etc.), and use principles of action learning to successfully facilitate each one.

Provision of One-to-One Support

- **Added Support:** Individual one-to-one support relevant to identified businesses needs must also be provided. This must be a minimum of 3.5 hours. This support must also be completed by 31st March 2022.

4. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Company data will be required to be collected by the Supplier and shared with Growth Platform for evaluation and data archiving purposes. In respect of the contract, Growth Platform acts as data controller and the contracted supplier acts as data processor.

All information and data collected for the purposes of evaluation will be managed according to strict confidentiality requirements. All findings will be confidential, with data anonymised and aggregated for the purpose of reporting to the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). All data will be presented in such a way that it does not allow any individual contact details to be shared without their prior consent.

5. Budget and Duration

The contract is to run for 11 months from late April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

The allocated budget per cohort is between £7,000 - £10,500 (excl. VAT) and will be paid as follows:

- 10% of the funding will be provided once a cohort is fully recruited
- 40% once half of the sessions have been delivered
- 50% on completion of full cohort delivery.

Should less than 8 SMEs complete the 18 hours Peer Network and 3.5 hour 1-2-1 support we reserve the right to reduce the final payment accordingly.

Whilst we wish to procure a number of suppliers to facilitate a minimum of 14, we may look to increase this number subject to the availability of funding.

6. Timetable

The planned project timetable is as follows, please note these dates are subject to change;

ITT Advertised	7 th April 2021
ITT Questions Deadline	14 th April 2021
ITT Responses	15 th April 2021
Submission Deadline	19 th April 2021 @ 11.59am
Clarification Interviews (if required)	21 st & 22 nd April 2021
Appointment Decision	23 rd April 2021
Contract Commencement	26 th April 2021
Contract Completion	31 st March 2022

7. Supplier Questions

Any questions should be directed to peernetworks@growthplatform.org, on or before the 'ITT Questions Deadline' date stated in the above timeline.

All questions and answers will be made anonymous and disseminated to all potential suppliers on Growth Platforms [tender page](#). It will be the responsibility of the potential supplier to monitor the site for latest activity.

8. Proposal Format

Submissions must be emailed to peernetworks@growthplatform.org before the deadline stated in the timeline above.

9. Evaluation

When awarding this contract Growth Platform on behalf of the LCR LEP reserves the right not to accept the lowest price tender, but the most economically advantageous tender taking into consideration the award criteria below.

Submission will need to score at least 65 to be eligible. In the event that all submissions score under 65, Growth Platform reserves the right to re-advertise the opportunities.

Evaluation Criteria

Quotations will be assessed and scored on the following criteria:

Quality 80% made up of;		Weightings
1.	Please include an implementation plan that outlines roles and responsibilities (with associated resource requirements), covering all aspects of the proposed service implementation for each of the service elements for the whole period from award of Contract to Project completion – include proposed start dates, length and duration of cohorts, whether you will deliver solely online or move to face to face when possible	20%
2.	Provide information on monitoring of the contract and how you will ensure our required outcomes are met. How will you align and fulfil the monitoring requirements set out nationally for the peer to peer programme? How will you keep the project team up to date with progress? How will you address any failure to generate leads? How will you respond to specific failures to generate leads e.g. in one quarter? How will you ensure that the pipeline of contacts generated through the project supports the profile of outputs required throughout the project? How will you deliver final evaluation of the campaign to provide an overview of outputs achieved, conversion rates etc. to inform future campaign activity.	10%
3.	How do you plan to identify, recruit and enrol SMEs and how do you propose to ensure each cohort has an optimal mix and balance whilst ensuring SMEs are representative of businesses across the LCR? Please specify if you intend to deliver mixed/general cohorts and/or more targeted cohorts. For targeted cohorts outline the specific networks, routes and methods to recruit for these. How do you intend to ensure you have maximised diversity in each cohort?	15%
4.	What do you see as the needs and characteristics and issues faced by SMEs within the LCR, and the range of issues they face associated with growth, productivity, innovation, strategy, people and skills, driving change, resilience, technology adaption - and how will you address these.	10%

5.	Detail the resources and your technical ability to carry out the service. Provide information on the workforce to be employed for performance of the service and level of experience and level of resources to be used. This should include any providing details of ability and experience of delivering facilitated group support to businesses (including delivering action learning sets) and one to one coaching to businesses. Also include ability and experience relevant to any targeted specific cohorts	15%
6.	Detail any additional value that you would derive for the participating SMEs. This should focus on any additional benefits that your proposals will deliver – above and beyond the core outputs and outcomes.	10%
7	Price Breakdown costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of group sessions • Delivery of 121 sessions • Marketing • Admin/monitoring/reporting • Other overheads 	20%

Scoring Methodology

Score	Response Rating	The tenderer gives a response which in the opinion of the evaluator
5	Excellent	Addresses all of the requirements and provides a highly detailed, robust and unambiguous response with relevant supporting evidence where no weaknesses are identified, giving the Authority complete confidence that the requirements will be met in full.
4	Good	Addresses all of the requirements and provides a comprehensive response with relevant supporting evidence, where no weaknesses are identified, giving the Authority high confidence that the requirements will be met.
3	Satisfactory	Addresses all of the requirements and provides a response with relevant supporting evidence but contains minor weaknesses or lacks clarity in some areas, giving the Authority reasonable confidence that all the requirements will be met.
2	Partial	Partially addresses the requirements and provides a response with some relevant supporting evidence but contains weaknesses which lack explanatory detail or clarity, giving the Authority some confidence that the requirements will be met.
1	Poor	Fails to address most of the requirements or provides supporting evidence that is of insufficient detail or contains multiple and/or significant weaknesses, and therefore gives the Authority low confidence that the requirements will be met.
0	Inadequate / No response	An inadequate response which gives the Authority no confidence that the requirements will be met. Or nil response.

10. Clarification Interviews

If it is felt that submissions require clarification, tenderers will be invited to a clarification interview. The representatives who attend should be the people who will be working on this contract. Suppliers will be sent an invitation with an allocated slot before the interview date in the timetable above.

11. Date Published

7th April 2021

12. Conditions of Tender

- Please be aware that due to the relatively low indicative budget for this work (i.e. less than the current OJEU limits) there is no regulatory obligation for us to provide feedback if you are unsuccessful.
- We reserve the right to discontinue this tender process at any time and not award a contract.
- You will not be entitled to claim from us any costs or expenses which you may incur in preparing and/or submitting your Tender at any stage of this exercises. This applies whether or not your organisation is successful.