



# **Departmental Liaison Officers**

Strengthening Partnerships

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# Principles for Departmental Liaison Officers

## Guidance for Candidates

This paper provides guidance for high performing candidates interested in the role of a Departmental Liaison Officer (DLO). This paper should be read in conjunction with paper *Departmental Liaison Officer – Guidance for Managers*.

A DLO placement is an extremely valuable career opportunity. Public servants who take up a DLO placement will significantly enhance their skills and experience and, during their placement, will operate in an exciting, fast paced and challenging environment.

### The Role of the DLO

The DLO is an important member of a Minister's office, and supports ministers on portfolio matters in an apolitical nature. The DLO works closely and cooperatively with the Minister's staff and the Department, and ensures effective relationships and appropriate communication between these parties. The DLO engages proactively and exercises sound judgment. While DLOs are employed by the Department, they are critical to the success of the Ministerial office and the Minister's ability to get the best service from the Department.

The DLO works cooperatively and respectfully with other DLOs, both within their own portfolio and across government. Ministers can be responsible for multiple portfolios and therefore may have multiple DLOs in their office from different departments. This can impact each DLO's role within the office (for example, one DLO may lead the Minister's Cabinet responsibilities; one may manage the Minister's Question Time responsibilities).

Working as a DLO is an excellent opportunity to form new and influential working relationships across government. DLOs quickly develop a deep understanding of how Parliament and Government operates and the role of their Department in the broader whole-of-government context.

### DLO Responsibilities

The DLO's main responsibility is to facilitate communication between the Minister's office and their portfolio. The DLO manages the flow of material within the Minister's office and between the Minister's office and the Department. The key responsibilities of a DLO include:

- Managing (including shepherding through the office within timeframes) Ministerial submissions, Ministerial correspondence, Ministerial briefings, Senate Estimates processes, Parliamentary Questions and Motions, Cabinet and associated committees, legislation and other portfolio documents (and returning actioned material to the Department).
- Facilitating and encouraging the Department's responsiveness to the operational requirements of the Minister and anticipating and advising the Department on potential policy views or actions taken by ministers that could impact on departmental advice<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> DLOs assist the Department to meet and manage Ministers' expectations and needs and deliver the required outcomes. Proactive intervention can assist departmental staff to tailor their advice to the Minister, and highlight and explain any relevant ambiguities or risks.

- Assisting the Minister's staff on engagement with the Department and vice versa.
- Managing departmental resources within the Minister's office.
- Responding to queries from all stakeholders, including members of the public, respectfully and providing helpful and timely information.
- Responding to the Minister's and Minister's staff's enquiries on portfolio related business.

While DLO responsibilities are similar across ministerial offices, each Ministerial office and Department will operate according to the preferences of their Minister, Chief of Staff and departmental executive.

## Principles for Departmental Liaison Officers

### Guidance for Managers

This paper provides guidance for managing the role of a Departmental Liaison Officer (DLO). It is intended for senior departmental managers, those involved in recruiting and supporting DLOs and Ministerial staff who engage with DLOs. This paper should be read in conjunction with the paper *Departmental Liaison Officer – Guidance for Candidates*.

A DLO is a public servant who is temporarily placed in a Minister's office to act as a conduit between their Department and the Minister's office. A DLO placement is a rewarding opportunity for public servants to gain experience in a Minister's office. A DLO placement offers individual development and insights into operating effectively as a public servant, supporting the government of the day.

A public servant placed as a DLO should be strongly supported by their Department. This includes from the initial recruitment, throughout the placement and upon return to the department.

### Accountability and Expectations

The DLO remains a public servant and must uphold the [values of the Australian Public Service](#) and adhere to the [APS Code of Conduct](#). This includes remaining impartial while working in the Minister's office. This does not mean the DLO must remove themselves when political matters are discussed. The DLO can certainly offer facts and advice from the Department. However, the DLO must not offer personal opinions or engage in activity that could be perceived as political. This could include acting as a de-facto adviser or as a de-facto electorate officer.

The DLO is accountable to the Secretary of the Department, despite taking day-to-day directions from the Minister, their Chief of Staff or the Minister's staff. The DLO reports to a manager within the department, in accordance with the Department's structure for supervision and administrative requirements, such as employment conditions, performance assessment and leave<sup>2</sup>.

The DLO works longer than usual hours and must be available during non-standard work times (e.g. nights and weekends) to support the Minister and the Minister's office. In most circumstances, departmental enterprise agreements offer a DLO allowance in recognition of the extra hours of duty, in lieu of any other payments or time-off-in-lieu arrangements.

### DLO Selection

DLO opportunities should be visible and available to all departmental staff. Senior leadership should support the identification and release of potential candidates. The placement is not typically filled on a permanent basis or by non-ongoing employees.

Candidates should be high performing and have the appropriate skills, knowledge, experience and attributes, including the capacity to undertake independent work that produces effective outcomes in fast paced environments. This allows DLOs to operate

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<sup>2</sup> Requests for significant periods of annual leave would not be expected during a DLO's placement.

successfully in the challenging environment of a Minister's office. These key skills and attributes make for an effective DLO, especially in terms of managing relationships.

Candidates must also have the ability to obtain a security clearance commensurate with the Department's operating environment.

Final selection of the DLO may involve the participation of the Minister or the Minister's Chief of Staff.

### **Phasing the Position**

The ideal length of a DLO placement is between 12 and 18 months. This allows for two DLO rotations in a typical parliamentary term. This is sufficient time for a DLO to become familiar with the role and operate with a high level of competence.

The transition between the departing DLO and the incoming DLO must ensure a smooth handover and continuity of service to the Minister and the Minister's staff. The departing DLO must be flexible regarding the end date of their placement, and department managers should be supportive.

When the Government calls an election, DLO placements must operate in line with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's [Guidance on Caretaker Conventions](#).

### **Support during the DLO Placement**

The DLO should have regular contact with the Department's Parliamentary coordination branch. The SES Band 1 of the Parliamentary coordination branch should regularly check-in with the DLO. The DLO should spend an occasional part day working from or visiting the Department to maintain a sense of belonging. The SES Band 1 should be available at all times to support and offer advice to the DLO.

Departments should support the DLO with appropriate mobile devices due the unpredictable nature of a DLO's role.

### **Returning to the Department**

The Department should recognise and value the DLO's work upon their return to the Department to highlight the importance and value of the role.

The DLO remains at their substantive level at the conclusion of their placement, notwithstanding any higher duties or allowances they may receive while performing the DLO role.

The Department should assist the DLO for their return to the Department, particularly with the identification of a suitable position, noting that they remain attached to the division (or possibly branch) where their substantive position was held. The Department should consider if the DLO has any preferences about where they would like to work upon their return to the Department, and consider if there are opportunities in these areas.

## Promotion and Support of the DLO Position

Effective promotion and support for DLO roles include:

- *Transparency* about the role, expectations and the working environment, including what the role is and what it isn't, and the fact that DLOs remain public servants and must adhere to the APS [Code of Conduct](#) and [Values](#). This should also highlight what the role can provide for now and into the future, by way of career insights and opportunities, including an enhanced ability to navigate "the grey".
- *Commitment* from the Department and the Minister's office to recognise the role and its value, making it work to maximise benefits and making it a rewarding experience for both the DLO and the Minister's office.
- *Investment* in the process, person and overall outcomes during the full life cycle of a DLO, which is not a set and forget process for the individual or Department, and includes regular oversight of the work health and safety for the DLO.

It is important to inform potential and successful DLOs, Chiefs of Staff, Ministers and departmental leadership of these three matters.