



Jandapac
emsonline
dynamic data management

Towards best practice rostering

A model for Youth Justice Centres

Date prepared:
13 January 2011

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About this document

This document was commissioned by Tracey George (project sponsor Doug Galbraith), Human Resources, Youth Justice Centres (YJCs) in December 2010 as an opportunity, parallel to a “posted timesheets” enhancement to the RosterCoster suite of tools as used by YJCs, to explore and potentially further enhance the design, development and implementation of *end to end* rostering practices.

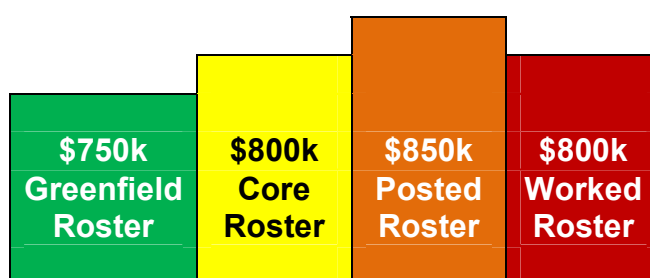
The document is *about* best practice rostering, but is not best practice rostering itself.

Best practice rostering is an integrated, automated “live” process, and is more than a document. It is more like a living document (much like a website) where, for example, a manager can make minor alterations to rostering business rules on a daily basis, if he or she chooses, where those alterations present as not only rules that a user can “look up”, but which also present as alerts and other types of prompts in the rostering software itself.

Any attempt to define best practice rostering within a standalone document, no matter how updateable, is labour intensive and typically out of date soon after a version of the document is distributed. In particular, “old versions” tend to persist in the field, even as later versions are released.

In a nutshell

This document contains quite a lot of words. If you are short on time, as you read, and would like the simplest possible idea of what the document proposes, in a nutshell, please consider the following diagram as food for thought. Then, go straight to the conclusion at the end of this document for a discussion about this diagram.



Introduction

Managing an effective workforce to deliver high quality human services involves a complex set of tasks that must consider strategic as well as operational issues. The process can be condensed to three fundamental strategic aspects – personal outcomes for service recipients, human resources and financial responsibility.

Best practice rostering involves consideration of all these aspects to maximise outcomes for individuals served within the program while addressing staff issues and maintaining a financially sustainable service.

Personal outcomes for individuals receiving a service are the primary purpose of human services.

Within this context, it is not possible to focus on this area without considering the workforce and financial realities.

Structuring rosters without considering the needs of employees is likely to result in a workforce that is neither engaged nor motivated, and this will impact on service delivery.

Further, a service must operate within the funding patterns allocated to each program.

While acknowledging the various considerations and nuances specific to each program, there is nevertheless a strong benefit in dealing with these within a solid framework. The framework we propose is four generic stages of best practice rostering, and a set of purpose-built tools to navigate a service through each stage:

- A set of greenfield rosters
- A set of core¹ rosters
- A set of posted rosters
- A set of worked rosters

The following pages will address our approach to each stage of moving towards best practice rostering, and the sorts of tools that can assist a service to make these four stages “talk” to each other seamlessly, such that a service’s worked (Greenfield, core and posted) rosters reflect its planned rosters as closely as possible.

The table on the following page highlights the relationship between each of the processes of best practice rostering and some of the tools available to support each process.

The tools described in the illustration below are all applications found on our purpose built data management platform EMSONline. The Excel / Access based platform offers you the convenience of a one stop shop to access the above mentioned tools including more program specific tools from our website www.RosterCoster.com.

¹ YJCs use the term “base roster” for what most other sectors call “core rosters”. We will keep to the term “core roster” for the purposes of this “how to” document only, but tools as released to YJC use the term “base rosters”.

The Process			
Greenfield roster	Core roster	Posted roster	Worked roster
<p>BLANK SLATE + Client needs</p> <p>The ideal roster you would put in place if you could start from scratch with a “green field”. Most organisations never actually achieve this ideal, however, it is vital to have it and to publish it, as a benchmark.</p>	<p>GREENFIELD + HR and corporate needs</p> <p>The planned roster that as at June each year is your best estimate of the roster that you will run in the coming financial year to fit, ideally, within your allocation.</p> <p>Please note that in many services, in the first few years of formal best practice rostering, there is a disconnect between the core roster and the allocation (most services discover that they have exceeded their budgets before the year has even started), and typically it takes 5 to 10 years to draw the two ends together.</p>	<p>CORE + Planned variations</p> <p>The planned roster that as at the start of the pay period is your best estimate of the roster that you will run in the coming pay period. Includes planned variations such as planned recreation leave.</p>	<p>POSTED + Unplanned variations</p> <p>The posted roster, except with unplanned variations (for example, sick leave, swapped shifts etc.) included.</p>
The Tools			
Roster Review Resource	RosterCoster.xls	RosterCoster.com	
<p>A virtual exercise that takes your organisation back to a “green field”, with no staff hired yet. An assessment of your Rostering needs creates an ideal (greenfield) roster that is a benchmark for your core, posted and worked rosters. N.b. if you are actually in a greenfield situation, then the exercise is not virtual. Rather, it is likely to be part of a tender process.</p>	<p>This high tech and robust Excel-based layout (greenfield, core and posted). Then, the instant a posted roster is signed off by the manager, it is uploaded to the web (www.RosterCoster.com), which can micromanage staff availability and shift replacement much better than any Excel based system (though we have found that managers “like” Excel for core and posted rosters in particular).</p>	<p>Staff availability and shift replacement should, we recommend, be done online. Anybody who has ever done this on paper, or in Excel or Word, will probably well know how complicated planned rosters can look by the end of the fortnight, if not done online. Colour coding everywhere, the initials of casuals sketched in all over the place, arrows and comments that present as ‘spaghetti’.</p>	

EMSONline

Overview

Our mission statement: "To convert, via a continuous improvement program, standalone templates and designs into networked apps on a single platform, in order to achieve maximum economy of scale benefits."

At the coal face, our mission statement means that *EMSONline* has a different look and feel in each organisation. It is a platform that facilitates and encourages data sharing between multiple platforms under a "horses for courses" model, where it is impossible or prohibitively expensive for a platform that you may have already purchased to give you everything you need.

For example, most payroll systems do not do rostering very well, and we are often called upon to fill that gap. We recommend that the use of *EMSONline* for rostering serves as a good example of *what EMSONline is*: [Featured app design - rostered shift management](#).

EMSONline (since 1999) is a sophisticated, robust, intranet-based platform that can be used to hosts apps (tools) within your own firewall. Deliberately coded in Microsoft Office to allow for ease of installation, *EMSONline* nevertheless interfaces with the highest quality online and other systems, [RosterCoster.com](#), [RosterCoster.xls](#), [Greenfield Rostering](#) ...

The core business of *EMSONline* is end-to-end Rostering performance, a set of Rostering modules and consulting developed over a period of more than a decade. However, the platform is quite generic, and able to host any business system. Key business areas that have taken advantage of this include OHS, WorkCover and a large number of stakeholders concerned with the business of formal client care systems.

EMSONline is also a useful vehicle via which you can access a wide range of useful resources and people within a well organised contracting and supply framework that contains all the necessary business infrastructure, project management processes, risk management and insurances that allow us to deliver a significant number of projects to both government and the funded sector, and to the private sector as well.

Finally, behind *EMSONline* is a [team of people](#) that comprises a significant skill-set with wide experience in government and beyond, and can deliver high quality technology and professional outcomes in our chosen field, human services, and in other sectors as well.

Features and benefits

- *EMSONline* is an intranet-based platform that nevertheless links into the many advantages of a web-based platform (for example, access to online user manuals shared by many organisations, or to RosterCoster.com) but which also has the security and other advantages of a platform loaded on your intranet (for example, ability to run workflows via your local email system).
- Once you have one app at *EMSONline*, other apps get to leverage off the work trail-blazed by that app, for example, lists of client details, house details, user permissions and anything else you add to the *EMSONline* databases to service your first app.
- Bolt your *EMSONline* onto your local HR or client management system, if you like, and have it inherit client details, house details, user permissions ... almost anything. We promote the idea that sometimes it is better for us to data share with competitors, rather than have you seek the often more expensive option of being dependent on one provider for all your systems needs. Put simply, some tools are just better at some things than others. For example, we do Rostering very well.
- *Your Microsoft Word and Excel templates decommissioned.* At *EMSONline*, you can design your own template (sketch it up in Excel, perhaps?) and have it converted into an app: *EMSONline* is pre-code for your own apps, which can be converted into genuinely networked interfaces much quicker than if you were to start from scratch. The benefit is that the pre-code fast tracks the early stages of the development of your apps, and the cost is split between pre-code and coding specific to your app.
- *Reducing administrative burden.* For every template processed via *EMSONline*, this is one less template that a user needs to think about or even know about. It's also one less file for a user to 'lose', either accidentally or via a hard drive crash. In short, there is no such thing as a blank template to download, say, from the internet or your intranet.
- *Keeping development costs very low.* We recommend use pre-existing templates close to 'as is', and then engage users help you upgrade them to *EMSONline* the tool 'live'. In a large population of users, you will get sufficient feedback, even if most users do not respond. Further, this approach maximises user acceptance, minimises change management, and minimises training. In short, this is an alternative to a large development team, and a formal specification that might, in ordinary circumstances, cost more than your entire budget, even before coding starts. The starting spec. is your existing system, and the testing team is you and your users.

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RosterCoster.xls (Excel version)

Overview

RosterCoster.xls contains benchmark annual cost predictions, and is linked to [RosterCoster.com](#), [Greenfield Rostering](#) and other rostering tools.

Originally a standalone tool built in 1993 by our principal Damien Ryan-Green (and maintained by Damien and the rest of our team ever since for the Department of Human Services and beyond), this Excel-based tool has survived, even against our own predictions, and even in the face of our [online version](#), which we designed to supersede the Excel tool. We put this down to the fact that many people simply 'like Excel'.

While the online www.RosterCoster.com seamlessly manages both planned and worked rosters, if it is the case that your organisation has used the Excel version of RosterCoster, and you wish to continue doing so, then you can. Work up your planned rosters in RosterCoster.xls, and then submit these (the Excel tool is, in its latest version, networked to data-share with web) into [RosterCoster.com](#), our recommended platform for staff availability and shift replacement.

Features and Benefits

At the heart of rostering software is clock-on-clock-off, just like in the old days prior to computers (punch cards).

However, in addition to knowing what time a staff member clocked on and clocked off, it may well be vital for you to know which clients the staff member provided 'individual support' to during the shift. [RosterCoster.xls](#) and [RosterCoster.com](#) treat these as shifts within a shift.

RosterCoster.com (online version)

Overview

Since 1999, we have been delivering apps and projects to the disability services and like sectors. In our first decade our major focus was directly-managed DHS services, but we are now extending ourselves in the funded sector. We are experts in operational management in disability services, project management, best practice rostering, software development and working with people with disabilities. We supply apps to all DHS directly-managed youth justice centres and disability accommodation services, and to an increasing number of CSOs (funded sector).

Features and Benefits

We employ the latest technologies (in particular via our valued partnerships with [Loop Software](#) and [Net Dynamics](#)) to keep apps ultra-simple for the user. For example, whether you are a casual, or a staff replacement officer with 1,000+ staff (be your own agency), your rostering / availability / staff replacement interface is the same single screen for all (anything more, and you're talking formal training programs). A shift, be it filled, unfilled, or an I'm available "shift", is painted onto a simple 2D grid, and it floats to the top of the screen or not depending on how useful it is to the person currently logged in. Offer one casual multiple shifts, or consider multiple staff for a single shift. Try it out at www.RosterCoster.com with our [online demonstration](#).

We note that the www.RosterCoster.com seamlessly manages both planned and worked rosters online, but that some organisations, which have for up to 18 years have been using the previous Excel-based RosterCoster tool, still use the Excel-based tool for planned rosters (but not worked rosters), and then upload those to www.RosterCoster.com.

Rostering Business Rules

Introduction

All organisations have quite an extensive set of rostering business rules. These are typically a combination of:

- Whatever is laid down in Awards
- Additional local business rules that are published
- Additional local business rules that are not published, but which are "local practice"

All three matter, and typically, those that are not written down are just as powerful as those that are not.

Our approach

Step 1: Assist an organisation to publish, in easy to read, access and maintain format (we recommend in database form*) all local business rules on a single site (which eliminates the problem of "version control" that arises when, for example, these sorts of things are done in print, or in files distributed.

Step 2: Ensure that as many of these business rules are coded as "compulsory" or "recommended" conditions in your rostering software - as it turns out, if a piece of software blocks an illegal shift, this is much more powerful than demanding that such shifts not be created.

Step 3: Assist an organisation to publish, as a subset of the database in Step 1, any items that could not be covered in Step 2. The net count of business rules thus created, the business rules that a manager needs to be actively mindful of, and remember, then, becomes a much shorter list.

*As part of our promotion of best practice between organisations, we maintain a master database of all business rules we collect as we move around organisations. This is a valuable resource, as it allows an organisation to browse business rules that have perhaps never occurred to them, or which they actually follow, but have forgotten to "switch on" in their own business rules database.

Some typical business rules

Just to get some momentum going, as "non-software" as the following seem, all of these can be databased and / or workflowed, in line with our mantra that as little as possible in the world of rostering should be "manual", relying on local rostering coordinators to manually control functions such as:

- Roster design must be in accordance with the Award and local best practice guidelines, which are in turn developed with reference to sector-wide benchmarks.
- For each accommodation setting, there is a RRR Roster Model that is based solely on an assessment of client need, before individual staff considerations are taken into account. While this roster may never be worked, it sits behind the core roster (which does take into account individual staff needs) as an ideal.
- Core rosters must be formally reviewed annually during June, and must also be reviewed each time there is a significant change in client need.
- Posted rosters must be posted to staff on or before the Tuesday before the roster commences.
- Timesheets must be posted to the manager on the first working day after the pay period ends.
- Etc.

Your Greenfield Roster Process

Where do 'greenfield rosters' fit in end-to-end rostering?

In the following example, your core roster design has put you \$0.2m over-budget even before the financial year starts, but good coal-face management during the year brings this back to \$0.1m over-budget.

- Your [Greenfield](#) rosters (a virtual exercise via which you "start again" with no staff hired yet, or via which you tender for new services) may recommend, for example, a starting allocation of \$1m.
- Your [Core](#) rosters (reviewed in June each year, with real staff) may then recommend an allocation of \$1.2m.
- Your [Worked](#) roster may then cost out at \$1.1m.

The above three dot points are processes, not tools. Tools that can help you manage and measure these processes include [RosterCoster.xls](#) and [RosterCoster.com](#) and the [RosterCoster Best Practice Rostering Program](#).

Behind every Greenfield roster dollar figure is a virtual exercise online: you shut down your operations and start writing rosters from scratch with your current client group, but no staff hired yet. The result is an 'ideal year' of operations that you can benchmark against your core roster (planned) costs and your worked rosters. This blank canvass approach considers only the programmatic requirements of your service in generic format without considerations for specific staff or individuals being served within the program.

So, how do I get my Greenfield rosters going?

Roster Review Resource

Our team walks your team through our [Roster Review Resource](#) (the "RRR", [click here](#) for more information). This walk-through is a necessary 'tick' to allow us to put our name to the results, and to allow you to defend your costings internally and externally, horizontally and vertically.

Then, once all the surveys are done, we press a button, and the software pumps out Greenfield rosters and costings, whether you need two (in the case of our smallest client) or hundreds (in the case of our largest client).

What sorts of organisations might be most interested in a set of Greenfield rosters and costings? For a start, funding bodies like government. "Greenfield rostering" is an output-based funding model and allocation tool.

And it models down to the level of a single "house", unlike all the others we've worked with in our projects inside government. These others all relied on batching houses into a (very) few roster *models*, rather than creating a different roster model for each individual house. Not because batching is better, but because in the absence of the right technology, batching is the only feasible option. To create hundreds of rosters manually, with all of them consistent in look and feel, but all different, would take ... well, you just couldn't do it.

OK then, how is an output based funding model, when one of the tools used is a rostering tool, which is more commonly viewed as a tool to manage inputs? Well, the answer is that the 'data in' is an assessment of client need. The 'data out' is a dollar figure. Everything in between is a black box doing data crunching, even if it happens to include a rostering tool*.

*Which happens to produce a set of Greenfield rosters, as a *by-product*. Such a useful by-product! So useful, in fact, that this by-product is often the thing that managers want more than the modeling benefits previously discussed. For example, managers who need:

- A point-in-time baseline. The rationale for the funding of one high profile org we once worked with, which was 7 years old, had never been written down. There was talk of a whiteboard session. Then, client numbers and complexity increased, but there was no "original" client count / client complexity baseline against which an argument for an increased allocation could be launched. And the funding body, of course, stated that the allocation was "sufficient", even in the absence of evidence. So, the manager called us in, just so he could have a point-in-time baseline at date X, so he could be armed from then on.
- To support a funding submission. This is perhaps the most obvious use of a greenfield rostering exercise. When you are tendering for new services, a greenfield exercise is not "as if" you were starting again: you *are* starting again.
- A benchmark. A benchmark roster pattern to just "have" as a benchmark. 2% over the benchmark might then be seen as efficient, but 10% over might be seen as unacceptable. That fact real rosters might never achieve the ideal is not the point.
- Coal face roster improvement. Greenfield rosters, laminated on the wall, so to speak, are something to work towards every time you review a roster for changing client need, or staff attrition. And the closer you get to the ideal patterns, the more the various roster lines between your houses will start to look the same. Great for

flexibility, and industrially, and in terms of not disrupting the family life of staff, if a person can shift from one house to another without getting a whole new roster line!

- Healthy checks and balances. Between, for example, direct service areas ("WeSay") and finance teams ("FinanceSay"). Or even between your costing tools (nearly every org has these, whether they are spreadsheets or multi-million dollars systems purchased) and ours. This is not a game of **either-or**, nor is it about the more expensive tools being *necessarily* the best. It's about **evidence**, and the more evidence you can get your hands on, the better.

Update on Youth Justice Centres

Youth Justice Centre currently use RosterCoster.xls to develop base rosters and posted rosters.

Your Core Roster Process

Where do 'core rosters' fit in end-to-end rostering?

In the following example, your core roster design has put you \$0.2m over-budget even before the financial year starts, but good coal-face management during the year brings this back to \$0.1m over-budget.

- Your [Greenfield](#) rosters (a virtual exercise via which you "start again" with no staff hired yet, or via which you tender for new services) may recommend, for example, a starting allocation of \$1m.
- Your [Core](#) rosters (reviewed in June each year, with real staff) may then recommend an allocation of \$1.2m.
- Your [Worked](#) roster may then cost out at \$1.1m.

The above three dot points are processes, not tools. Tools that can help you manage and measure these processes include [RosterCoster.xls](#) and [RosterCoster.com](#) and the [RosterCoster Best Practice Rostering Program](#).

Your core rosters are the rosters you plan to run in the coming year. Your core roster \$\$ is primarily influenced by:

- The classifications of your regular staff;
- The shift patterns; and
- Your costing parameters (predictions of sick leave usage, overtime etc.).

About your costing parameters

Our experience is that costing parameters are, in most organisations we visit, largely "guessed at". This opens the door to forces that would doubt the accuracy of your costings, and by extension, the costing tools (either yours or ours as the case may be) themselves.

We recommend a **process based on evidence** in working up your costing parameters. In short, we recommend don't rush this step. Then, you will be able to assert that your costings (and by extension, your allocation requirements) are accurate "given" a list of defensible parameters (assumptions).

Comment: if you do not use something like [greenfield](#) (ideal) rosters to develop new initiatives for the coming financial year's [core](#) and [worked](#) rosters, then you are somewhat

forced to plug in last year's overtime, sick leave and so on as the coming year's parameters and history will reliably repeat.

Beyond that...we recommend that you review these via a formal roster review process each year in June on a dedicated 'roster day', a concept we first introduced at DHS Southern Metropolitan Region in the mid 2000s. And then, review them during the year in the event of significant client or staff changes, "but only if".

Your Posted Roster Process

The planned roster that as at the start of the pay period is your best estimate of the roster that you will run in the coming pay period.

Update on Youth Justice Centres

This process is the subject of the current project running parallel to the introduction of this document, the software upgrade in YJCs that will produce posted timesheets out of RosterCoster.xls. To be developed separately.

Your Worked Roster Process

Where do 'worked rosters' fit in end-to-end Rostering?

In the following example, your core roster design has put you \$0.2m over-budget even before the financial year starts, but good coal-face management during the year brings this back to \$0.1m over-budget.

- Your [Greenfield](#) rosters (a virtual exercise via which you "start again" with no staff hired yet, or via which you tender for new services) may recommend, for example, a starting allocation of \$1m.
- Your [Core](#) rosters (reviewed in June each year, with real staff) may then recommend an allocation of \$1.2m.
- Your [Worked](#) roster may then cost out at \$1.1m.

The above three dot points are processes, not tools. Tools that can help you manage and measure these processes include [RosterCoster.xls](#) and [RosterCoster.com](#) and the [RosterCoster Best Practice Rostering Program](#).

Your worked roster is your total set of your "staff timesheets", which we bundle together as your organisation-wide roster within www.RosterCoster.com.

The costing of this roster is your "worked roster \$". At the heart of Rostering software is clock-on-clock-off, just like in the old days prior to computers (punch cards). But latest technologies allow an almost unlimited range of additional features and benefits. One example among many follows.

Why do staff agencies do so well?

It's a question we ask ourselves often, because in a previous life (in the 1990s) we were line managers in a very large government accommodation service, and we were not even all that aware of the *existence* of staffing agencies. We certainly didn't use them.

One of our team proposes the following:

- When filling shifts, your OPTION A is most likely your own staff, and your OPTION B is likely to be an agency. If you do not have the right tools to do OPTION A well, then

an agency, which most likely does have good software, is free to market OPTION B as an efficiency, and then hope that you never get too good at OPTION A.

- Our aim is to give this assertion some healthy competition, starting with online availability and shift replacement. Then, once you start looking more like your own agency, we look to the rest of your OPTION A, in particular the performance of your worked rosters against your planned rosters in the context of your organisational goals, which are, after all, the point of Rostering in the first place.

Update on Youth Justice Centres

YJC currently use online rostering, and we recommend that an added benefit would be "worked (end of fortnight) timesheets".

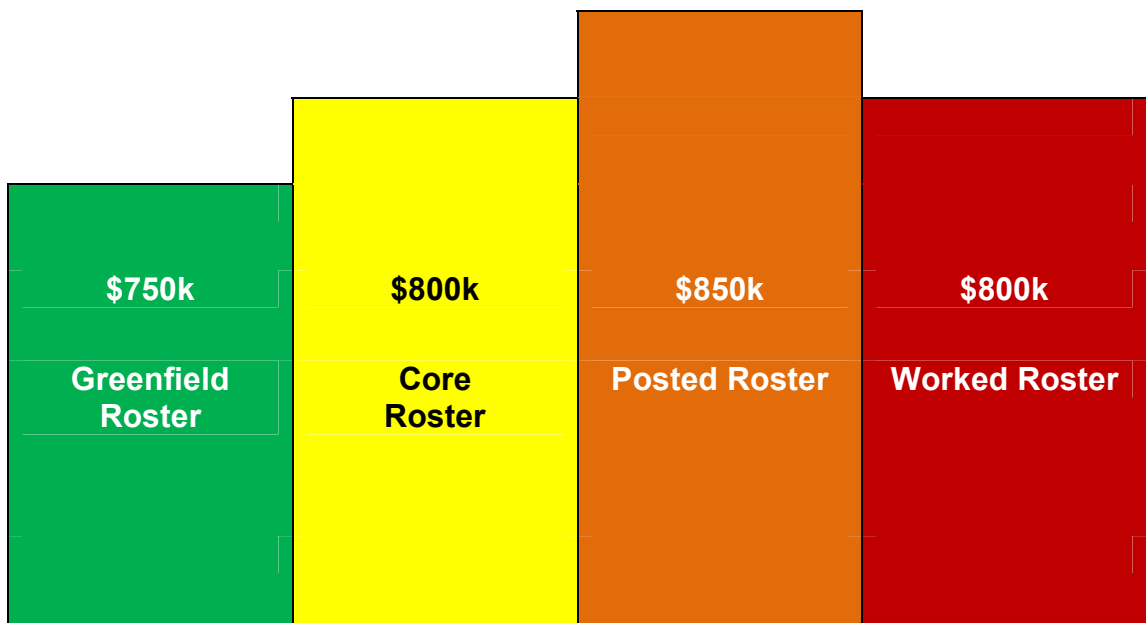
Platform distinction (a standard model)

Platform		
Your Payroll System	EMS Online	RosterCoster.com
	Includes our benchmark costing tool for annual predictions of a core "planned" roster cost, which can be compared via tailored reports (see below) with "worked shifts".	Includes an Award builder to allow shifts to be costed for comparison with the core roster costing and other purposes.
	Security provided by your own firewall.	Security provided by us.
Staff details table	Good platform for drafting and preparing "planned rosters" (core rosters at start of year and posted every 4 weeks). Cover as many shifts and planned leave at this level as you can, to minimise the "unplanned" staff replacement you will need to deal with in the online platform, see right.	Right platform for "worked rosters". Users can log shift preferences online "at work or home", and the org can shift-replace online, with no limit to the number of alterations made to each shift.
Accepts a .csv file each fortnight from RosterCoster.com.	Ongoing tailoring of reports quick and inexpensive to create, allowing you to "have" a range of tailored reports that you could not justify having coded online for your specific org.	Contains basic reports, and you can have additional reports created in this platform. However, recommend that it is more cost effective to create most tailored reports in the less-expensive-to-manipulate EMSONline (see left).

Conclusion

We will conclude this document in the simplest possible way, with what we propose is an ultimate aim of best practice rostering.

And that is, to be able to put in front of a CEO or a unit manager alike, a simple graph that looks exactly like the following, as relates to that person's management responsibilities:



We propose that such a simple outcome of best practice rostering is relatively simple to achieve, but is very rarely achieved.

Having said that, the software and processes that makes such a simple diagram possible are powerful, and the management decisions you can make using such a model is powerful.

For example, in the above example, the daily rostering habits of managers and staff are actually bringing expenditure *down*, even though the organisation (or the unit, as the case may be) is over budget.

In the absence of such a model, a CEO may run a risk of targeting daily rostering as “the issue”, when actually, the posted rosters at the start of each fortnight is where the budget

blow-outs are occurring. (There is also an apparent blow-out in the core rosters, but for reasons we will not expand on at this point, a jump between greenfield rosters and core rosters is more acceptable than a jump between core rosters and posted rosters, or between posted rosters and worked rosters. The reasons for this relate typically to the history of a service, and the rostering habits that have developed over long periods of time, some of which may not be ideal, but which nevertheless which, if reversed too quickly, would cause net losses due to disruption.)

Further enquiries:

Youth Justice Centres:

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Tracey George and Doug Galbraith, HR rostering initiatives 2011

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