

January 2022

FAQs – CoPlan Spaces

This document answers frequently asked questions on the initiative for councils to employ staff from across NSW and have them work remotely from DPE offices.

What is CoPlan Spaces?

CoPlan Spaces will provide up to 50 workstations in DPE offices across NSW for regional councils to base new planning recruits.

The 18-month pilot program will help address the growing shortage of planners and certifiers in regional areas, with nearly 20% of councils saying it can take up to a year to find staff.

Larger populations in NSW's metropolitan cities and regional centres means these areas are home to more skilled workers, including planners. CoPlan Spaces will support councils in recruiting planners who live in metropolitan areas and regional centres, by giving council staff access to a DPE workplace in these areas. The idea is that councils can access larger talent pools and hire remote staff in metropolitan areas and regional centres to fill vacant council planner roles. These remote staff can have a workstation at a DPE office, and can travel to the respective council area as needed for meetings, site visits, consultation, etc.

Council staff who take part in the program will also have the opportunity to co-learn and network with other council staff as well as form stronger relationships and work more closely with DPE planners.

CoPlan Spaces is an initiative of the Planning Delivery Unit and will operate for an initial 18 months, until 30 June 2023, with view to extension if the program is successful.

How can I apply for a space?

Workspaces will be allocated to councils on a first come, first served basis, by filling out [this form](#) on the Planning Portal, at www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/coplanspaces.

Councils must state their preferred office location for their new starter. Regional councils may request up to two workspaces.

Where are the spaces available?

DPE office workspaces can be requested at the following locations across NSW:

Armidale	Broken Hill	Gunnedah	Moree
Newcastle	Orange	Parramatta	Queanbeyan
Wollongong			

What IT equipment and access will be provided?

At each location, council staff will be given access to a desk space, chair, screen and a secure pass for the office.

Councils **must provide their employees with necessary IT equipment to do their job** (i.e. laptop, mouse, keypad, and any necessary health and safety adjustments).

The physical spaces and provision of screens and access to printing, meeting rooms will differ dependent on the choice of office and facilities available.

All candidates will have access to use workplace facilities, such as printers, meeting rooms, collaboration spaces, washrooms, and kitchen facilities, with the opportunity to network and get to know other teams in DPE.

We cannot provide staff car parking at our Parramatta office, but some regional offices will have access to parking.

How will the program operate?

All staff will be provided with building passes or other arrangements to access their nominated DPE office. This means they can access the building during normal business hours, dependent on location.

At most offices, workspaces will be allocated on an agile, 'hot desking' basis, with access to alternate workspaces, dependent on availability.

Council staff will have access to general office facilities dependent on the office chosen, as detailed above.

Working in DPE offices is an opportunity for council staff to network with DPE staff and come together in person on a range of initiatives or projects they may already be collaborating on. This will help council staff to form stronger relationships with DPE and council staff.

Council staff will also be able to co-learn new ways of working and process improvements from other council staff taking part in the program.

How will council staff make connections?

All council staff will be allocated a DPE buddy to provide a health and safety induction to the building and assist them to navigate the office space safely. Buddies will be available to support staff and make introductions so they can make workplace connections with other planners who work within DPE.

Working in DPE offices is an opportunity for council staff to network with DPE staff and have easier access to meet with DPE to build and develop relationships.

Council staff will also have the chance to co-learn and network with other council staff taking part in the program.

How will requests be assessed and approved?

Applications made via the form on the Planning Portal will be reviewed as they are received. If applications meet the requirements and there is space within the requested office a workplace will be allocated.

CoPlan will operate on a first come, first served basis. Our regional offices will have more limited workspaces available, due to smaller office sizes.

For more information on any special needs please contact Danielle Huntsman, Assistant Project Officer, Planning Delivery Unit at danielle.huntsman@dpie.nsw.gov.au or 02 8275 1801.

What are the workplace health and safety (WHS) considerations?

All council staff will be required to meet all DPE Work Health and Safety (WHS) protocol. Council staff will be required to complete a DPE-hosted building induction and online WHS training module prior on commencement.

All council staff participating in the program must have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccination to use a DPE office workspace. Staff will be required to show proof of vaccination and may also be required to undertake COVID-19 training. Council staff will be expected to wipe down desks with sanitising wipes found across the office before and after using a workspace.

All staff will be required to be mindful of others in the workplace by following physical distancing and practising good hygiene. Under no circumstances should staff come to a DPE workplace if they are unwell.

Why are we running this program?

Through in-person and online council engagement, PDU became aware of a shortage of planners in regional NSW. In response to this feedback, a survey was sent to regional councils in July 2021 to understand more about the skills shortage, and strategies underway to resolve it.

With 35% of regional councils participating in the PDU survey:

- 21% said it took between 3 to 6 months to fill vacant planner roles
- 18% of councils were not able to fill vacant planner roles for a 1 year
- 65% of regional councils said they would be open to exploring access to workstations in Sydney or other areas so their staff could work remotely.

CoPlan Spaces is an initiative of the Planning Delivery Unit to help alleviate pressure on councils. Particularly those who are under resourced and help them get additional access to qualified planners and certifiers.

How did we consult with councils to develop this initiative?

PDU has been working with many stakeholders (agencies, councils, and peak bodies) to collaborate on ways to address the emerging shortage of planners in regional NSW, with both long, and short-term solutions.

We will continue to work with peak bodies and universities to help position planning as a career of choice. We expect to run a number of other initiatives to support councils during 2023.

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