

Agreeing your agency's flexible working vision and goals

A toolkit for HR
managers and
change leads



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FLEXIBLE WORKING

Having built the leadership buy in needed by presenting the case for change, your next step is to work with them again, this time to agree your agency's future state for flexible working.

Why your agency may need this toolkit	3
What this toolkit contains	3
Influencing leaders decision tree	4
What is a goal or vision for flexible working?	5
<hr/>	
Step 1 Understand individual perspectives	
1. Meet with leaders individually	6
Sample questions	6
<hr/>	
Step 2 Bring the different perspectives together	8
1. Recap the case for change	8
2. Report on FIT maturity	
3. Bring individual perspectives together	9
4. Test and refine	10
5. Plan for change	11
<hr/>	
Step 3 Follow up	13

Building leader support for flexible working

Why your agency may need this toolkit

The NSW government has committed to ensuring all government sector roles can be flexible on an 'if not, why not' basis in a way that maintains or improves service delivery for NSW. It's the responsibility of agency CEOs to meet this policy commitment, and the PSC has provided a strategic framework, [Make Flexibility Count](#), that articulates what 'if not, why not' looks like for an agency.

Understanding what this policy commitment looks like in each agency's unique operating context can be an early challenge, and articulating that at the leadership level, and building buy-in, is invariably the first step. To help, we've provided two toolkits. The first, *Building leader support for flexible working*, is for building the buy-in from your leadership group you will need to agree that flexible working is necessary, given their impact on the success and take up of flexible working. The second toolkit, this one, is so you can then continue to work with your leaders to articulate your agency's future goals or 'vision' for flexible working. This vision will form the basis of all of your communications across the agency about flexible working, and help you to adapt any PSC tools, supports and guides in support of your goals.

What this toolkit contains

Use this toolkit to work with your leaders to agree what your agency's goals are for flexible working, namely what future state it wants to reach and what that looks like, what risk appetite exists for doing things differently, what supports, tools and resources are needed to reach the goals you've determined, and who will drive and be accountable for delivering this work.

This pack contains two resources to help: this guide, and a PowerPoint template for use in your leader workshop to guide discussion.

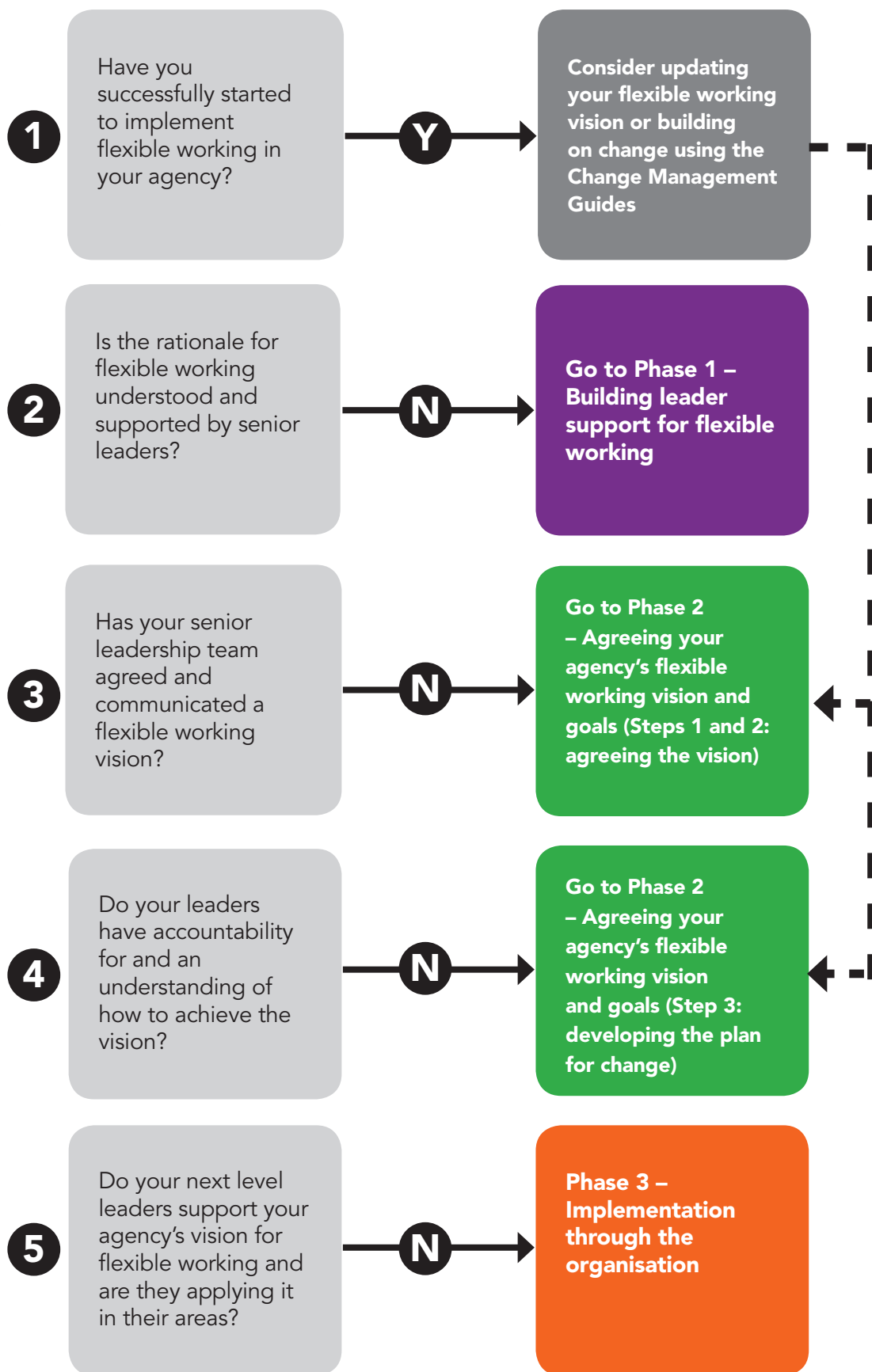
THIS TOOLKIT



Phase	STEP 1 - Building leader support for flex work	STEP 2 - Agreeing your agency's flexible working vision and goals	STEP 3 - Implementation through the organisation
Overview	Co-develop an effective case for change with leaders which establishes a clear rationale for flexible working in their agency, including how it will support existing business objectives and address agency challenges.	Reach agreement on how the agency will support flexible working, including the desired future FIT maturity of the agency and how the agency will get there (through strategies outlined in the flexible working change guides).	Once there is senior leader buy-in and agreed priorities for flexible working, engage different manager groups to communicate and help them apply flexible working within their teams. (this content not covered: see Make Flexibility Happen)
Audience	Executive and senior leaders responsible for determining strategic direction.	Executive and senior leaders responsible for determining strategic direction.	Middle management leaders responsible for delivering on strategic direction.

Influencing leaders decision tree

This decision tree will help you identify where to prioritise your efforts in influencing leaders to support the implementation of flexible working, and which step of the toolkit to dive into first.



What is a goal or vision for flexible working?

Having built the leadership buy in needed by presenting the case for change, your next step is to work with them again, this time to agree your agency's future state for flexible working.

Because culture is largely shaped and influenced from the top, it is critical to understand your leaders' perspectives on this and surface any misgivings or misconceptions before you develop your program of work. The collective capture of these perspectives, and the moderating of any conflicting perspectives as part of that process, becomes your agency's 'vision' or goals for its future of flexible working. Once a vision is agreed and endorsed by your leadership group, you can then plan your program of work to drive any changes needed.

It can be tempting to skip this step, and time poor executives can be hard to get together, but until you have a thorough understanding of everyone's risk appetite for doing things differently, and an agreed future state, your entire program of work can risk losing focus or support, if your leadership group are implementing different ideas in their divisions or have different expectations of the work needed.



Step 1: Understand individual perspectives

1 Meet with leaders individually

The first step is to meet with as many leaders as possible individually to understand their own flexible working principles. This will allow you to identify commonalities and any divergences to be addressed when aligning the vision of the leaders overall.

Follow the following process for conducting the individual interviews with your leaders:

1. Preparation

Prepare your leaders with detail on what the interview will be about and develop appropriate questions to uncover the required information.

2. Questions

Encourage the leaders to be honest and express their perspectives on flexible working, including their understanding, current approach and what the future approach should be for their division.

3. Analysis / Synthesis

Analyse the findings gathered from the interviews and develop material for the following workshop with leaders to identify areas of agreement / disagreement.

Sample questions

Ask them the following sorts of questions to draw out their perspective on flexible working, and to surface any misgivings:

- Have you seen flexible working in the past? How so?
- What do you see as the benefits of flexible working within our agency?
- How would flexible working work in our agency? What would need to be in place to make it work for all roles?
- What are our barriers to progress? Why?
- Are there any limits to flexible working in our agency that we can't move beyond?
- What do you think flexible working will look like at our agency in 3-5 years' time?

Another useful questioning technique is the "5 why's" method, to uncover the deep beliefs that underpin a leader's behaviour. E.g. ask a leader: Do you feel uncomfortable encouraging flexible working in our teams? Why? Note the answer and ask 'why' again to this statement. Keep asking 'why' until it feels as though you have reached the root of the problem.

Step 1: What to do before you meet with your leaders

You can use the six principles of the [PSC's strategic framework for flexible working](#) to provide structure for your leaders to explore their responses. It's possible that any misgivings could be resolved by reinforcing any of these principles as guidance in your agency.

For everyone	Mutually beneficial	About the team
Leader led	Context matters	Give and take

The descriptions for these principles, as contained in the Make Flexibility Count Framework are:

- **For everyone** – Everyone is able to request the types of flexibility that make sense within their roles but what it looks like will vary depending on the role.
- **Mutually beneficial** – Flexible working will be successful when it creates the best outcomes for employees, employers and customers.
- **About the team** – Flexible arrangements must have a team overview about how work will be distributed and solve for the needs of team members, including what is fair and equitable for that team.
- **Give and take** - Flexibility requires give and take between the employee, manager and team.
- **Leader led** – Employees will take up flexible work when they see their leaders building flexible working into their own lives and across their organisation.
- **Context matters** – Agencies will need to develop their own strategies based on their role types, operating contexts and industrial arrangements.



Step 2: Bring the perspectives together

If it is possible to get your executive together for a second workshop to define the agency priorities for flexible working, prepare for the session by pulling together all of the data described in *Building leader support for flexible working*, to establish the current state, and provide a reference for the conversation around 'what's next?'

If it is not possible to bring the leaders together for another short workshop, you could consider an approach that uses one-on-one conversations with leaders, then leveraging an existing senior leadership forum presentation to present your findings and seek approval for a final flexible working vision.

● **Prioritise business objectives**

Present the case for change that was developed at the previous workshop and revise any of the key points from that discussion, if necessary.

● **Report on FIT maturity**

Present the results of the previous two Flexibility Implementation Tracker (FIT) assessments for your agency (February and September 2019) to highlight any areas for focus, and dot points on any results that have changed over that time. The aim of the discussion is to identify where the agency currently sits on the FIT, and where your leaders would like it to be in 12-24 months' time. This activity can include a discussion of what needs to change in order to get there.

Ensure that you provide the appropriate level of detail within each of the five key themes of the FIT (Culture and Mindsets, Communications and Awareness, Skills and Experience, Workforce Management, and Technology and Systems) to assess the gaps.

For example, say your agency fell short of achieving 'consolidated' in 'Culture and Mindsets' (namely, 65 - 80% of employees across the agency are satisfied with their access to flexible working; over 50% of managers and leaders provide active and visible support, and employees are encouraged to apply for any reason). You note that agency All Staff meetings are not proactively rotated by time/day to accommodate different working patterns. A simple change to the way agency meetings are scheduled could make a difference to your FIT result, as well as contributing to improving inclusion.

Step 2: Bring the perspectives together

Use the following slide with your leaders to start shaping a shared vision for flexible working at your agency, in line with your business objectives:

1. Current vs. future state

Work together to determine where the agency is currently and where you want to be within the next 2 years.

- *Using the FIT assessment, determine where your agency is currently positioned against the FIT criteria*
- *Determine where your agency wants to be in 12-24 months using the FIT criteria*

2. Compare FIT assessments

Use the previous FIT assessment to determine where the agency is falling short in flexible working practices.

- *Assess whether the FIT assessment aligns with what your leaders identified*
- *What are the barriers to achieving the desired end state?*

Bring individual perspectives together

Report back on the discussions you had individually with your leaders: identify where there was broad agreement on what flexible working means for your agency, and the areas where further discussion is required, to arrive at an agreed vision for each of the six flexibility principles. Below is an example of how you might present your report.

Initial flexible working vision

Based on conversations with the senior leadership team, the following draft principles have emerged in developing a vision for flexible working:

Broad agreement ←————→ **Further discussion**

For everyone	Mutually beneficial	About the team	Leader led	Context matters	Give and take
Everyone can request the types of flexibility that make sense within their roles.	For FW to be successful, it must create the best outcomes for employees, employers, and customers. It must improve service delivery and not increase labour costs.	Flexible working should be considered within the context of the team and should consider the impact on team performance and structure.	Leaders must do more than communicate the vision and need to visibly demonstrate how they are building FW into their own lives and enabling their teams to work flexibly.	Given the diversity and size of our agency, one size can't fit all. Different types of flexibility will suit different roles.	FW does not mean you always get what you want as an individual. It places mutual obligations on each person to make FW a success

Step 2: Bring the perspectives together

At this point, and while you have your leaders together in a workshop, it is worth reporting back on the concerns about flexible working that surfaced during the individual interviews and allowing an open discussion. Peer dynamics will typically resolve most of these, but surfacing them is important to reach your goal of developing a shared understanding of your agency's appetite for doing things differently (e.g. 'Everything is on the table, provided we meet client obligations'), or only focusing on one/two key deliverables (e.g. promoting job share), as this will dictate the nature of your program of work. Even a seemingly modest goal of democratising access, so everyone in the agency understands they can use the current policy without career penalty or stigmatisation, is a significant achievement from where most agencies start.

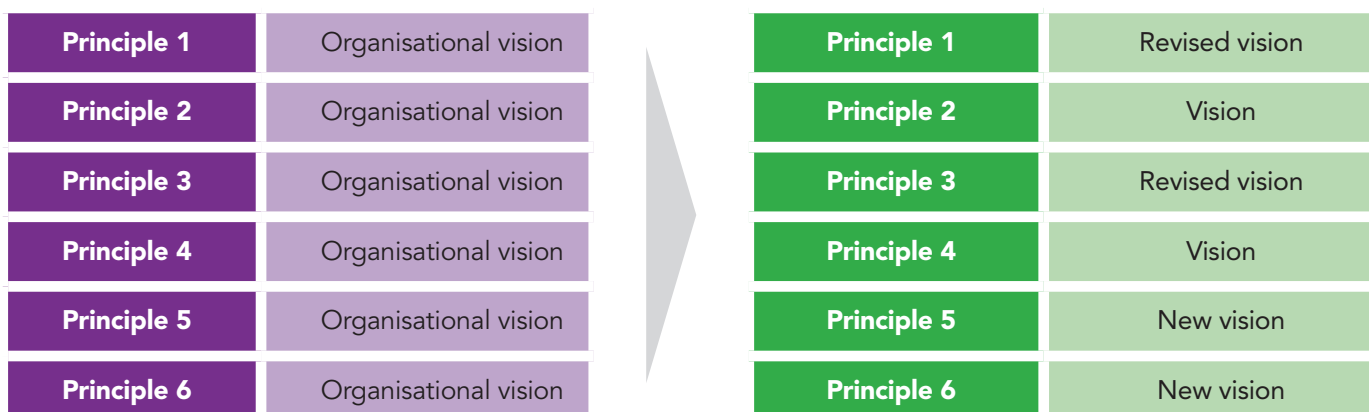
● Test and refine

Based on the guiding principles you have presented, ask your leaders to explore what each of the associated vision statements will look like in your agency. Focus more time on principles where there is lack of alignment between leaders.

This will help test each vision and will require leaders to refine each to ensure they are all relevant to your agency. Ask the following questions to help test and refine each vision:

- Is the vision relevant to your entire workforce or only certain segments?
- Is the vision too prescriptive i.e. could it unintentionally reduce flexibility or exclude certain segments of the workforce?
- How would you embed these principles into the agency's way of working? (This will give you some pointers for when you develop a program of work)
- Do these principles go beyond your existing flexible working practices? How could you push them further?

The diagram below represents the process of refining your agency's flexible working principles:



Step 2: Bring the perspectives together

The discussion may mean that additional detail is needed, to provide potential solutions to questions raised, such as capabilities like technology. You can prepare for this discussion ahead of time by reading the PSC [Flexible Working Change Playbook](#). If you use the online tool, you can custom-build a playbook that speaks only to your agency's FIT results. It is worth reading the playbook early on in this development process, as it will give you a wide range of ideas/solutions for your agency's flexible working change planning and plan for any anticipated executive questions. Once you have received clear agreement on how flexible working will look and feel in your agency, it gives you a stronger footing to start scoping a program of work with resourcing.

5 Plan for change

Planning a full program of work will not be possible as part of this workshop but you can at least capture any thoughts your leaders have about deliverables, timing, resourcing and accountability before you wrap up the session. Work with leaders to assess both the ease of implementation and impact, to prioritise each strategy. You will also need your leaders to be very clear on individual roles and goals, what success will look like, and any expectations they may have on updates and progress. Don't let the workshop close until you have secured an executive sponsor to help you steer through any further executive signoff or reporting required.

If you can secure agreement from your leaders about the key change strategies that will deliver the vision, it will be easier for you to then go away and develop a detailed plan of what needs to be done and obtain the necessary resources.



Step 2: What to do when you meet with your leaders

Workshop activity - Assessing and prioritising strategies

- Identify change strategies from the [PSC change playbook](#) to deliver on each principle and vision. Make space for your leaders to contribute their own ideas about change strategies.
- Prioritise each strategy based on ease of implementation and level of impact.
- Assign accountability and a measurement for planning and action to hold leaders / others to account.

Guiding Principles	Organisation vision	Suggested change strategy from the PSC change playbook to support principle	Accountability and plan	Measure
Principle 1	Revised vision	Strategy 1 – Culture & Mindsets Strategy 4 – Culture & Mindsets Strategy 3 – Comms & Awareness	Identify who will be accountable for planning and action. You could allocate accountability by change strategy, by principle or by behaviour and practice area	Identify the metric to indicate action has been taken
Principle 2	Vision	Strategy 1 – Culture & Mindsets Strategy 5 – Comms & Awareness Strategy 3 – Comms & Awareness		
Principle 3	Revised vision	Strategy 2 – Culture & Mindsets Strategy 2 – Skills & Experience Strategy 3 – Comms & Awareness		
Principle 4	Vision	Strategy 2 – Technology & Systems Strategy 1 – Technology & Systems Strategy 1 – Culture & Mindsets		

Step 3: Follow up

Document all the outputs from the workshop including the principles and associated vision, any key strategies, accountabilities and milestones, and distribute to your leaders for validation. Additional one-on-one meetings may be required. As part of pulling the plan together, consider how to make progress visible, and also plan to recognise and celebrate when milestones are met. Story-telling could be useful and help put a human element to the difference flexible working makes to people's professional and personal lives.

If you haven't seen it yet, the [PSC Make Flexibility Happen](#) guide will help you take those next steps to developing your project plan for flexible working. When you are ready, circulate a more detailed forward plan, and check-in with leaders on a bi-monthly basis through one-on-one meetings, group meetings and other project reporting processes.



For more information
visit the [PSC website](#).



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