Design your own flexible working trial

Toolkit

Works for me.
Works for NSW.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

NSW GOVERNMENT

Contents

Why design a flexible working trial?

The Premier's policy commitment to flexible working means we need a new approach to plan and implement flexible working; one that supports both managers and employees alike.

Until now, most flexible arrangements have been made at the discretion of manager, on a case by case basis, and generally to accommodate individual personal circumstances.

The policy commitment is that *all roles across the government sector can be flexible on an 'if not, why not' basis, provided we maintain or improve service delivery to the people of NSW.* While it is the responsibility of CEOs to implement this policy commitment at the agency level, for it to work effectively, as a manager you will need to consider how to implement it in the context of your team.

The commitment means that:

- anyone can seek a flexible working arrangement, for any reason;
- managers and teams need to consider how their services will be maintained or improved as part of their decision making;
- it is generally better to have this conversation as a team— and the whole team 'owns' the arrangements. This prevents it being purely a manager's responsibility; and
- these conversations can start from a place of 'given the work we have to do, what flex might be possible, can we make this work, and if we can't, why not? Then—what else might be possible?'

This toolkit is designed to help you as a manager bridge the gap between the policy commitment and making it work for your team. It will help you to set up a step by step flexible working trial and check if it is working. It will build your ability as a manager, although you will not have to become a flexibility subject matter expert to do it. From your team's perspective, it will build a shared sense of ownership of the trial, and the opportunity to re-think where, when, how and by whom the team's outcomes are achieved.

Here's what you can expect from this toolkit:

- **knowledge:** information on how to have a whole team work flexibly
- **tools:** sample templates, and resources for managers
- **evaluation:** recommended evaluation survey questions to check how your team is tracking.

This toolkit is built around the finding that people, when provided with some flexibility and autonomy in their working lives, continue to deliver, and often even deliver better, for their organisation. It is also based on the assumption that given the right support, people can challenge— and change—their beliefs about their work, their colleagues and their organisation.

Why this approach works

Throughout 2019, we partnered with a wide range of teams and branches across the government sector to road-test this approach to flexible working: where flexibility is available to everyone in a team, while ensuring service delivery standards were either maintained or improved.

We worked with road maintenance crews, civil lawyers working in Aboriginal communities, traffic emergency patrol teams, health infrastructure planners, child protection workers, tow truck drivers, human resources professionals, human services policy experts, health leaders and environmental policy experts.

Evaluation of the first stage of pilot teams indicated that using team-designed flexibility did not compromise client service or personal performance. Teams reported that they produced sustainable results and stronger ways of working. An upwards trend in self-reported productivity, wellbeing, perception of leaders and team cohesion was also consistent across the teams.

Our sector-wide data supports these findings, showing that employees who work flexibly:

• have higher employee engagement, wellbeing and job satisfaction

• report stronger motivation to go above and beyond for the organisation

• use less unplanned leave

• report increased team connection

• report a strengthened commitment to their team, and their agency.

We have developed this toolkit to help you to take the same approach so you can meet the policy commitment, and address a few typical business problems along the way (for example, planning for an ageing workforce, supporting people returning from medical or parental leave, managing an office move that may present logistical commuting challenges for significant sections of your workforce, etc).

Thank you

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"Workplace flexibility has changed my life, it has given me the chance to be a parent and a full-time worker, I feel happy, refreshed, content at home and in my place of work."

Employee, Grants Division, Legal Aid NSW

What are you aiming for?

This toolkit will support you to establish best-practice flexible working in your team and create an environment where:

- flexible working is open to all team members

- the process is based on trust

- there is flexibility in where, when and how work is done and who does the work

- flexible working arrangements are mutually beneficial—clearly meeting the needs of your team, clients and the individual

- teams look for ways together to increase flexibility that will both maintain and improve service delivery, as well as team well-being

- performance is assessed on output, not time necessarily spent physically present

- possibilities are considered for job and work redesign to enable increased flexibility (with respect to standing industrial arrangements)

- all team members share responsibility for the success of flexible working in their team

- there is respect for each person's flexible working arrangement

- there is a positive team culture that supports the flexible working.

This approach is not intended to replace any formal flexible arrangements, or those made under industrial instruments, e.g. a formalised part-time arrangement.

The aim is to provide all team members with the opportunity to trial the flexible working arrangements that suit their working lives, while maintaining (or improving) service delivery and team effectiveness. These may be formal, informal or ad hoc arrangements (see Glossary of terms), dependent on your team requirements, agency process and business needs.

Managers

Consider how you will feel about 'letting go' of being the gatekeeper of flexible working.

By following the approaches outlined in this toolkit, you will create a culture of flexible working and an environment where people will not need to ask your permission to engage in informal or ad hoc flexible working every time they use it.

See the Glossary of terms for more detail on these definitions. The parameters that you create in this process and the discussions that you have with your team will form the boundaries of the trial, so if these parameters are stuck to by your team, then asking to use it each time becomes redundant in these circumstances (although formal, ongoing arrangements will still need a conversation and sign off—e.g. part time or job share).

"A flexible workplace does require trust—but I feel strongly that people in my branch and team can be trusted to do get their work done, wherever they are."

Manager, Policy Division, Environment, Energy & Science, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment

"Our manager is always open to talk when available and acts as a good sounding board for new approaches in (our) work."

Employee, Driver Aid Services, Transport for NSW

Your goals for the trial

What is your role?

Your role, whether you are a part of a senior management team or a manager, is to embed flexible working in your team in a way that makes sense operationally. You may not need to lead the trial (you can appoint someone else to do this), but you do need to ensure accountability for its progress and outcome.

Whether you already support flexible working or are starting out but willing to try, it is useful to understand your role and responsibilities in creating a flexible work culture.
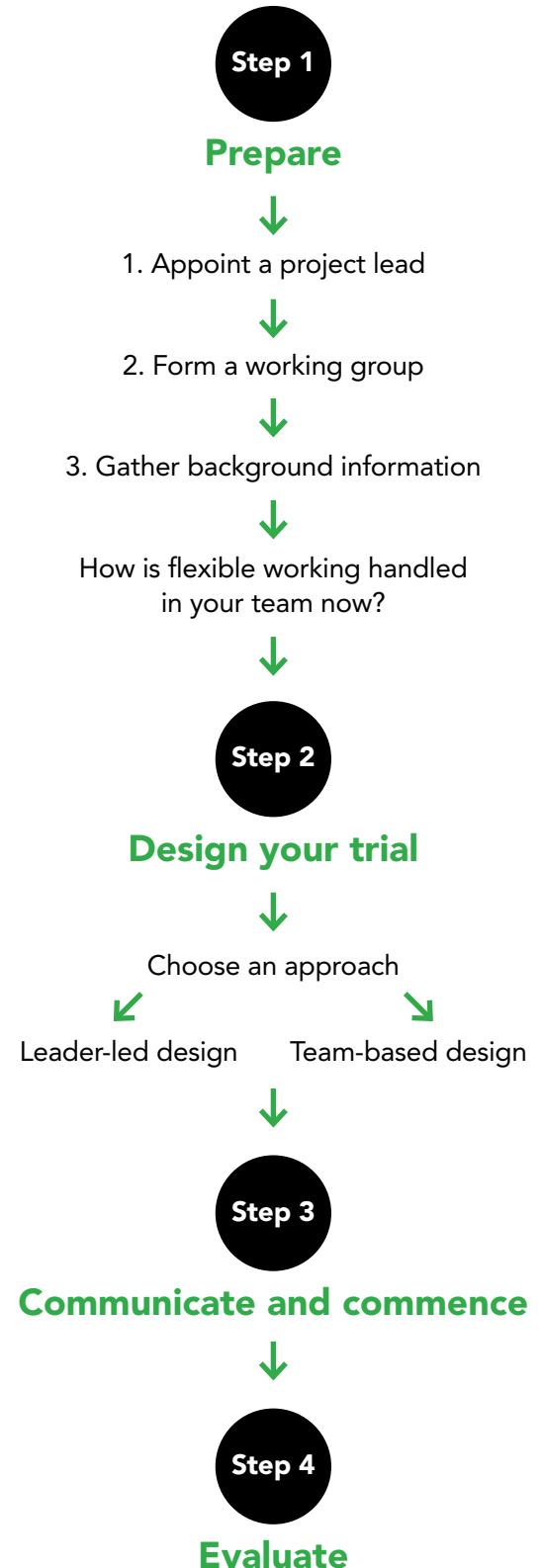
You can do this by:

- **Being a flexible leader**—show clear support for flexible working through actions such as booking team meetings during school hours, or advocating for better technology or support where needed, and role-modelling flexibility by sharing your own experience of flexible working with your team.
- **Being proactive and communicating regularly**—by leading the conversation, in team meetings and one-on-one check-ins with your team members. Reinforce your commitment to making flexible working a success.

What role do employees play?

The approach is only as successful as the effort made by the team —all staff—not just leaders and managers. During the trial, and to ensure success, employees can:

- experiment and ensure that the <u>flexible working practices</u> they try out are good for **them**, their **team** and their **clients**, and be willing to **adjust them when they don't work**
- **provide feedback** to their manager about their flexible working arrangements and how they are going
- **support their colleagues** to experiment and explore different ways to work flexibly.

Step 1

Prepare

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1. Appoint a project lead

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2. Form a working group

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3. Gather background information

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How is flexible working handled in your team now?

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Step 2

Design your trial

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Choose an approach

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Leader-led design   Team-based design

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Step 3

Communicate and commence

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Step 4

Evaluate

Executive support

Step One is designed for leaders to follow in order to set up a successful trial, but anyone (manager or employee) can use the toolkit. However, for the process to be sustainable and supported, make sure you have support from your relevant executives—and that this is clearly articulated to the team to give you the best start possible.

The role of the working group

This group is responsible for spelling out what you can and can't change during the trial—with reference to your current award, local hours agreement and ICT environment, etc.

It is the role of the working group to clearly communicate any parameters to all participants in the trial and solve problems if they arise.

1 Appoint a project lead

Appoint a project lead to manage the move to the new arrangements. This is a staff member with enough authority to make critical business decisions and communicate to the team and agency executives. It can be you. The guidance we've provided below is directed primarily to the project lead from here, unless otherwise specified.

2 Form a working group

This group should include representatives from your team, including the leader and non-executive staff.

We also recommend that you include various subject matter experts (who will likely be external to your team but within your agency) who can advise and manage actions in their area of expertise.

We recommend that you include:

- **HR**—for all industrial, work health and safety and other agency HR policy advice. Request that the representative is senior enough to provide definitive advice to the team.
- **IT**—so that your team can access any technology already available/funded to support flexible working; and provide any relevant training.
- **Communications**—so that consistent messages about the trial can be sent out to all participants to set expectations.

"Staff need to understand what a good business plan and (associated) output look like (e.g. SMART goals, aligned with organisation goals). This knowledge can help all staff be accountable (and plan for) flexible working."

Employee, Health Infrastructure

Prepare

3 Gather background information

We recommend that the project lead explores the potential challenges and opportunities ahead in preparation.

Briefly consider the questions below to understand how your team currently uses flexible working. You don't need to definitively answer these questions now—they'll be assessed and answered as you start planning—but they help as initial thinking.

A trial period of 3–6 months is recommended, after which you can review it using the recommended evaluation survey questions, modify where required based on your findings, and then implement as business as usual for your team.

Understand the essential requirements of your team's work

- Who are your clients and how are they serviced? i.e. face to face, over phone, over email.
- What hours does the team work? Is this fixed or moveable?
- What are the essential requirements of roles i.e. customer facing, using technology that cannot be accessed outside of the office?
- Are there any industrial award considerations that could influence flexible working that you need to be aware of i.e. core hours, bandwidth. If unsure, contact your local HR representative for clear advice.

What's your current flexibility?

- Explore current flexible working arrangements, as well as how flexible working is currently handled in your team.

Trial duration

- How long do you want to trial the new arrangements before they become business as usual?

Capability and performance

- Does everyone have a clear idea of what they need to deliver, when and to what standard?
- How are managers supported to bring out the best in their teams?
- How is performance development managed in the agency?

3 Gather background information cont.

Communications

- How do you communicate in your team? i.e. individual catch ups, team meetings, group emails, etc.
- Do you need to introduce more regular communication while you trial the new way of working?

Technology

- What technology does your team have access to, is it consistent across the whole team? If it is not consistent—how is this managed?
- What technology do you currently use for collaboration purposes? i.e. Skype for Business, MS Teams

Current projects & executive buy-in

- Are there any projects (current or coming up in the next 6–12 months) that would impact on your team? If so when and how?
- Do you have enough executive buy-in to support the shift to flexible working?

Evaluation

- Evaluation is recommended to see how you are tracking. Evaluation survey questions are available for use pre and post-trial period to provide insight and show progress over time.

Check your own assumptions

Consider your own assumptions about the 'ideal worker'. Is the ideal worker really someone who is present and available full time, which has historically been presented to most of us as the ideal—or could it be someone who gets the job done, regardless of their work arrangements? This requires some time for self-reflection, for you to challenge your own assumptions and examine how flexible working is handled in your team before you start this process.

"I feel safe that our managers trust our work output even if we work in a flexible set-up."

Employee, People Team, Department of Communities & Justice

How is flexible working handled in your team now?

Before you begin talking to your team, consider how you currently approach flexibility. Your answers to the questions below will give you a steer on what might need to change, even in those teams where most believe some flexibility is fairly well established.

What is the current situation in your team?		What your result could mean
Who initiates flexibility?	• An employee • The agency	Most agencies have employee-initiated flexibility, which can lead to stigmatisation around those who do use it, and resentment from those who do not, but would like to.
Is flexibility?	• A business accommodation • A business imperative	Making flexibility a business imperative allows for better managing its impact on your team's day-to-day work, and its peaks and troughs. Otherwise, it can be hard to accommodate what everyone wants.
Are managers?	• Reactive • Active	Proactively encouraging your employees to consider flexibility allows for planning, and to look at system-wide impacts.
Do reasons matter?	• Yes • No	The policy commitment is that anyone can ask for any reason, so 'reasons' per se no longer matter (unless a given arrangement won't work for the team, in which case you may need to know what objective the employee has).
Does flexibility operate as a two-way street?	• Yes • No	Not discussing flexibility as mutually beneficial and achieving an equilibrium of meeting the needs of the team, the agency and the individual can mean it isn't used as a two-way street. Both employees and agencies need flexible arrangements to be flexible.
Does job performance matter?	• Yes • No	Currently, there are many biases that poor performance means an employee can't work flexibly, but in fact a lack of flexibility can sometimes be the root cause of the poor performance. Managing to a set of clearly articulated performance goals and tasks makes establishing accountability and autonomy easier to establish, both key conditions for successful teams.
Is flexibility?	• Individually based • Team based	Individually-based flexibility makes it harder for managers to identify any system-wide or delivery impacts of having multiple arrangements in place. Taking a team-based approach mitigates any risks in this regard.

Choose an approach

There are two options to design flex work for your team. While these two approaches can be followed separately, both complement each other and it may make sense to use elements of each, according to your work context.

Both approaches are designed with the understanding that individuals, teams and organisations have the capacity to change, and to create better and more productive workplaces.

A Leader-led design

This is the approach where the leader and managers determine a set of guiding principles and parameters for flexible working (based on the background information collected) and then share with their wider team.

This approach is built around the assumption that by changing the role of all team members, including the role that leaders and managers take in the team in support of flexible working, the team attitude towards flexible working changes for the better. Leader-led design may be useful if you wish to implement flex work at scale in one group with a leader-focused approach.

B Team-based design

This is where the whole team or branch (director, managers and all team members) come together to design a flexible working plan for the team.

Taking a team-based design approach in the workplace is an opportunity for teams to more strategically plan and arrange their work, in order to make it more efficient and building an understanding of shared goals and responsibilities amongst team members.

At its core, team-based design recognises that no one can know their work better than the team doing it—and is also a valuable team building exercise. Team-based design works well if you want to democratise the approach to flexible working from the outset, making the approach a whole of team decision.

Design your trial
Leader led design

(A) Leader-led design

1 Complete template
Project lead

Once the background information from Step One has been reviewed and collated, the project lead is ready to create the parameters and guiding principles that will provide the 'rules of the road' for your team's flexible working arrangements.

A sample leader-led template is available in the resources library for you to use as a guide.

Once the initial draft of the leader-led pack has been put together, you are ready to form your working group.

Flexible working solutions

It is important to understand that you will be designing flexible working solutions that suit your business operations—with the intention of either maintaining or improving service delivery.

By using the information gathered in the preparation phase, you can build principles and parameters that suit your specific business needs and operating environment.

2 Consult your working group
Project lead

Familiarise the working group with the draft leader-led pack and get their feedback and guidance. Create a plan incorporating all actions that need to occur prior to commencement.

Meet with the working group regularly in the lead up to the commencement of the new approach to flexible working for the whole team.

If required, create a new version of the leader-led pack including any adjustments required based on working group feedback.

3 Consult with managers
Project lead

It is now time to consult with managers across your team—sharing the draft leader-led pack for review and feedback.

This group will manage the move to greater flexibility for their team and it is recommended that you offer both group briefing sessions and individual catch-ups.

Post-consultation, if required, create a new version of the leader-led pack, including anything you need to adjust based on manager feedback.

"Within my current team our team ethic, genuine loyalty to our manager and each other enables us to plan for a fair flexible working environment"

Employee, People Team, Department of Communities & Justice

"Senior management should be the best role models (they can be). Managers & team leaders need to trust their employees."

Employee, Policy Division, Environment, Energy & Science, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment

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Design your trial
Leader led design

4 Involve your executive
Project lead

Provide the leader-led pack to your relevant executives for endorsement.

Post-consultation, create a new version of the pack including any adjustments necessary from executive feedback.

"Flexibility brings the best in a team environment, high productivity and general wellbeing."

Employee, Grants Division, Legal Aid NSW

5 Prepare to communicate, and commence

Project lead and working group

- Finalise your plan to trial flexible working.
- Confirm the length of the trial period.

Managers

- Start a conversation with your team about how you will implement flexible working.

Working with last-minute hesitations

You may find that there are some colleagues that have real dilemmas or misgivings you haven't been able to address in the design phase. Where possible, try to work with these colleagues to support them through the trial. Support for managers is also available in the resource index.

If there is pushback or an expressed desire for delay that can't be quantified or substantiated but remains unresolved, you can gently remind your colleagues that there is a senior executive expectation to embed flexible work and the benefits to the agency, based on your own unique operational environment—notwithstanding that it is also a Premier's policy commitment and a critical enabler of achieving Premier's Priority #14.

It may also help to reassure them that it is a trial, and any service interruptions can be quickly identified and addressed—it is not like a software rollout, where your team is locked in for five years or so after a design phase is 'locked down'.

Design your trial
Leader led case study

Case study

**Using a leader led approach
to build flexibility**

Policy Division—Environment, Energy & Science
(Department of Planning, Industry & Environment)

Leaders were keen to trial flexible working but had some concerns—specifically, how to manage coverage; maintain high standards of delivery; manage people when you can't see them; ensure team cohesion and let go of the existing permission-based model.

Together, the leadership group developed a set of overarching parameters for the pilot that addressed executive concerns but balanced the need to provide adequate access to flexibility during the trial. These included simple guidance that prioritised communication and respect, e.g. advising your branch of work pattern and work location via branch calendars.

The leadership group also set high-level principles, e.g. performance is assessed on outcomes, not presence.

These principles and parameters were communicated to all staff, and managers then worked with their teams to agree on what worked at a team level—including creating coverage plans, using technology to stay connected, monitoring productivity and having clearer understanding of each other's roles and priorities.

What happened?

Overall, it was found that sustainable flexibility did not adversely affect client service or personal performance. Indeed, teams reported that they continued to be productive and meet the high standards of client service during the trial—in fact one of the strongest findings was an increase in productivity. Self-reported staff wellbeing, general perception of leaders and team connection also improved.

What caused the results?

- The expectations of leaders were clearly articulated via the principles and parameters
- Teams understood their work priorities and required outcomes
- Role-modelling and proactive, regular communications to normalise flexible working from the executive
- Using technology such as shared calendars and sharing location/availability via Skype for Business facilitated trust both ways
- Trust was a given between teams and managers.

Design your trial
Team based design

B Team-based design

1 Design a plan
Project lead and working group

Review content gathered in Step One.

• Agree on the scope of the project.

• Agree on business outcome measures that you want to either maintain or improve and who and how this information will be collected/recorded.

　○ Measures to consider include performance, productivity and output, stakeholder views (including carers and families), and team member wellbeing.

• Agree on a time table for the trial of the new arrangements in your team before they become business as usual.

2 Conduct a whole of team workshop
Project lead and working group

Using the team-based template and team-based workshop facilitator guide and slide deck, confirm with your team:

• Why adopt a team-based approach to flexibility?

• What is the role of leaders and managers/team members?

• What are the possible time commitments for leaders and managers, and team members?

During the workshop

• Gain an understanding of the particular work area in terms of the business objectives, nature of work (what, when, how, etc.), team structure, roles and functions, and current use of flexible working.

• Have an open discussion about the possible dilemmas you have in adopting a team-based approach.

• Identify the support required for both the promotion of participation and ensuring everyone stays engaged for the duration.

• Record the decisions made in the team-based template

• Identify the next steps required before trialling the new arrangements.

While it may seem like yet another meeting, the benefits of holding a workshop with your whole team are significant. People rarely have a chance to come together to talk about how they would like to work, because they are generally too busy doing the work.

The whole team workshop is a valuable team-building exercise, and it can easily be integrated into your team or branch planning days.

The workshop allows people to have a say in their working arrangements—and the testing of the team-based approach done in 2019 showed that it produced sustainable results and stronger ways of working that could be applied to other delivery areas.

3 Involve your executive
Project lead

Provide the team-based pack for endorsement by your executive team.

Post-consultation, if required, create a new version of the team-based pack including any adjustments required based on executive feedback.

4 Prepare to implement
Project lead and working group

- Finalise your plan to trial flexible working.
- Confirm the length of the trial period and start date.

Managers

- Start a conversation about how you will implement flexible working for your whole team.

"Our manager is always open to talk when available and acts as a good sounding board for new approaches in (our) work."

Employee, Driver Aid Services, Transport for NSW

"I found that working remotely on reports or data analysis allowed me to concentrate more."

Manager, Policy Division, Environment, Energy & Science, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment

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Design your trial
Team based case study

Case study

Using a team-based design approach

Partnerships, Frameworks & Systems Branch (Department of Communities & Justice)

How implementation occurred

- The overall intent was to increase flexible work for all staff, improve the quality of staff experience with flexible working (e.g. being able to access flexible working for any reason), create more flexible teams, improve manager support and develop a culture of flexible working.

- After background information on the branch was collated and assessed, the whole branch came together to do a planning session where they identified the business outcomes that should either be maintained or improved:

  1. Business outcomes: reputation, performance and capability: availability and responsiveness to stakeholders, customers; key result areas and work priorities met; and innovation.

  2. Team: supportive team culture; creatively working together; and team engagement.

  3. Individual: work/life balance; learning and development engagement; and more efficient use of time.

- In this session, the participants worked through the team-based template and documented the output. This included outlining the flexibility operating guidelines that would support the operation of a successful trial. E.g. director and managers to monitor the skill mix/level across the week to ensure coverage;

managers to ensure an equal division of work; shared calendars and out of office notifications; use of MS Teams or Skype for Business to show availability.

The branch also designed flexible working principles that were incorporated into the branch business plan, e.g. personal responsibility to deliver the work to a high quality and agreed time; shared responsibility for making flexibility work; and balancing team and individual needs.

What happened?

- Access to and the frequency of use of flexible work increased, particularly for flexible hours, working from home/other offices, and for informal and ad hoc flexible working. Staff also reported there was reduced emphasis on the reasons for flexibility, so they felt more comfortable in engaging in flexibility.

- A strong culture of flexible working that was created. Evaluation results indicated that staff took responsibility to deliver their work (100% agreement), experienced the culture as being trusting and open (100%), felt there was a balance between team and individual needs (100%), flexibility operated as a two-way street (95%), there was shared responsibility for making flexibility work (89%), and there was respect for each person's flexible working arrangement (89%).

Design your trial
Team based case study

Case study cont.

Using a team-based design approach

What happened?

- Improvements also occurred in how work was conducted (e.g. a new TRIM system and information management protocols were implemented).
- Team members agreed that business, team and individual outcomes were either maintained or improved. Reported improvements included:
  - Innovation in the use of MS Teams for collaboration and connection
  - Supportive team culture and creativity in working together
  - Improvement in team working relationships and morale
  - Improvements in work/life balance, and in Learning & Development

What factors contributed to these results?

- The mandate for flexible work from the executive gave confidence for all to participate.
- A high level of executive, manager and team support for flexible working.
- The branch adopted a strengths-based trusting approach, led by the director.
- The branch focused on opportunity and ways to improve rather than a focus on fear.

Teams were responsible for coordinating their flexible working arrangements, and the director and managers made sure that there was good communication across the branch.

A short note on everyone using flexible working

While we've said anyone can work flexibly, for any reason, this does not mean that everyone has to. Some people really like to do their job the same way they always have, whether that is by having their roster provided to them, or adhering to 9-5 office hours, always in the office. This is completely fine—just ensure their needs are as well articulated as everyone else's when you start having a conversation about flexible working.

Communicate and commence

Your trial is now ready to begin. Step Three focuses on how you will communicate your plan and expectations to your team, with managers taking a lead on implementation.

1 ## Send a plan
Project lead

Send your plan (i.e. the completed leader led or team-based pack) to the whole team. A library of draft communications including the 'launch email' are available for use.

It is also recommended that you send the pre-trial survey so you can understand where your team is at. This will be repeated at the end of the trial so you can measure how you went. See Step Four for more detail.

2 ## Follow-up
Managers

Follow-up any questions in team meetings—develop a coverage plan or an implementation plan with your team.

A sample implementation and monitoring plan is available in the resources library for you to use as a guide.

3 ## Start your flexible working trial

Once commenced, communicate and/or check in with your team members at least once per month throughout the trial period to reinforce:

• flexible working is a workplace skill we can all develop

• trust, respect, connection and engagement across the team.

You do not have to create any new communication methods; instead use what you do already e.g. team meetings, individual catch ups, or whole team emails. This helps to normalise flexible working and signal to your team that everyone can engage in flexible working without being judged negatively.

"My team really worked and planned well to allow (flexible working) to happen."

Employee, Environment, Energy & Science, Department of Planning, industry & Environment

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Communicate and commence

4 Mid-point check-in
Project lead and working group

Make time for a mid-point check in—this is a trial—this gives you an opportunity to make sure things are on track, refine anything that may not be working and identify where there are inconsistent practices or resistance to flexible work that could harm the overall success of the trial.

If you are doing this trial for a whole agency (or large division) and there is one team with a manager who does not implement flexible working for their team—despite the executive directive—it can really affect overall employee engagement, particularly for the affected team.

If everyone has been told they can expect to discuss flexible working with their manager, passive inaction can become corrosive to the working environment. Everyone expects fairness and equity, even if their arrangements must differ for service needs. If your check-in reveals concerns or issues that can't be solved as a group, refer it to the working group for resolution.

5 Evaluation
Project lead and working group

At the end of the trial period, and before you decide if the new flexible working arrangements will become business as usual, send the underlined evaluation survey questions, (if using) to collect data on how your team went, and fix anything if necessary.

Note: See library of draft communications for 'end of trial template'.

Communicate and commence

Team connection case study

Case study

Team connection and technology

Policy Division—Environment, Energy & Science
(Department of Planning, Industry & Environment)

Managers had concerns around how to ensure team cohesion when the whole team was working flexibly.

The trial provided simple guidance which prioritised communication and respect (e.g. advising your branch of work pattern and work location via branch calendars).

In addition to this one team in Policy Division decided to trial the use of MS Teams to stay connected, while supporting people working flexibly. Every morning the team would 'chat' on their MS Teams page, to let everyone know where they were working and key priorities for the day. It was also used to share important updates throughout the day, as needed.

What happened?

Team productivity increased, high standards of client service were easily met and importantly the team stayed connected to each other while working flexibly.

The team found great benefit sharing priorities so often and openly. The team found that MS Teams supplemented the 'by the by' conversations they had when sitting next to each other, keeping everyone informed, regardless of their location, or part-time/leave arrangements. This led to improved engagement, support for each other and importantly, wellbeing.

Team members shared that they felt not only comfortable but confident to work flexibly.

What caused the results?

- The team came together to make the decision to use MS Teams and how to use it.
- Teams better understood each other's work priorities and required outcomes.
- It wasn't only used as a business tool, chat and emojis were used to communicate and motivate and helped the team stay connected remotely.
- By using this medium—no one in the team felt they were 'missing out' on anything as a result of flexible working.
- Trust was a given between teams and team leader—flexibility was a legitimate and supported way of working, which was valued.

"I appreciate Frank's* positive attitude and behaviour throughout the trial (of team-based design for flexible working). Ordinarily Frank can be quite resistant to change. Whilst Frank has not necessarily put his hand up to work from home himself, he is supportive of those around him who would like to. I would like to acknowledge him for working really hard on a personal level to be supportive of such change because I recognise that change can be quite difficult for him."

Manager, Legal Aid NSW. *Name changed.

Why evaluate?

We recommend evaluation so you can track your team progress and the overall success of the trial. By using the same survey pre and post-trial you will have measurable results that you can communicate to others in your agency—which will help them with the process. The survey has questions about your team's perception of their own productivity, wellbeing, and views of leaders—this is all valuable data that will help you as a manager understand your team a little bit better—broader to flexible working. However, ensure privacy is maintained and no responses can be individually identified, no matter how well meaning the intent.

1 **Conduct a review**
Project lead and working group

As the trial period concludes, review the pre/post survey data and service delivery measures. Use this data to conduct a review, attended by the project lead, leaders/managers and working group members.

During this structured session, ask the group a number of questions:

- What was planned?
- What really happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What dilemmas were anticipated? How did they play out?
- What can we do better in the future?

2 **Agree on steps**
Project lead and working group

Agree on next steps for flexible working in your team based on the results; refine arrangements based on your evaluation findings.

3 **Communicate how it went, and next steps to your team**
Project lead

4 **Share results with your executive and across your agency**
Project lead and working group

E.g. Yammer, present at an all staff meeting, and share case studies or lessons learned that could help other managers to roll out the approach more broadly.

5 **Flexible working continues as business as usual in your team**

"Just wanted to say a huge thank you for the chance to work more flexibly and share a moment with you: I have been working from my mother's house, which is a long drive from my house. Working out of the office has allowed me to spend more time with her…as you know she has limited time left and it has really left her feeling reinvigorated and wanting to see the silver lining in the cloud."

Employee, Legal Aid NSW

Glossary of terms

NSW Government policy position on flexible work	Flexible working is about rethinking the where, when, how and by whom work can be done, in a way that maintains or improves service delivery for the people of NSW.

It does not mean every role, or every individual, can or should (or has to) work flexibly. It does mean that everyone can begin a conversation about what type of flexible working is available to them in their context, regardless of the reason they are seeking it, how long they've worked there or if there are performance concerns. |
| **Flexible working can be** | **Formal:** This is where you have a formal agreement, approved both by your immediate manager and HR, that usually involves changes in your job contract and working conditions (e.g. part-time work or job share).

Informal: This is where you have an agreement with your immediate manager and/or your team that, when business and team needs are met, you engage in a particular type of flexible work (e.g. varying your start and finish times, working from home) on an irregular basis.

A key aspect of this arrangement is that you have control over when you engage in flexible working, as long as you follow agreed guidelines for:

• when you do this (e.g. taking account of work demands); and
• who and how you need to communicate your change in work to (e.g. notifying your team)

Ad hoc: You access flexible working (e.g. vary your start time) when something happens unexpectedly or your needs change on short notice (e.g. because of a personal need). |
| **Agile/activity-based working** | Agile work in government context generally means activity-based working (or hot-desking) and refers to the physical workplace environment. While some concepts may overlap e.g. remote working—agile work is not the same as flexible working. |

Resource index

Templates to get you started

Resource	Overview
1. **<u>Leader-led template</u>**	This is a template you can use if you choose the leader-led approach. Sample content is included for guidance.
2. **<u>Team-based template</u>**	This is a template you can use if you choose the team-based approach.
3. **Team-based workshop facilitator pack —<u>facilitator guide</u> and <u>slide deck</u>**	This is a presentation and guide designed for those who choose to run the team-based approach.
4. **<u>Implementation and monitoring plan</u>**	This is a plan where you can easily document the flex work options of each team member. Note that it can be used as a record of flex work and can be reviewed at any time. Can be used for either the leader-led or team-based design approach.
5. **<u>Library of draft communications</u>**	These are suggested draft communications to get you started communicating to your team during the trial period.
6. **<u>Evaluation survey questions</u>**	These are suggested survey questions you can use to measure how the new arrangements are tracking for your whole team. We recommend loading them into your usual survey tool, and ensuring responses are anonymous.

Resource index

Resources for managers and employees

Resource	Overview
7. <u>FAQs for agencies</u>	These are common questions and answers that teams have at the beginning of any move to team based flexible work, and are helpful to circulate.
8. <u>Managing a flexible team</u>	This tip sheet provides guidance for managers on day to day team management, and how to manage for outcomes.
9. <u>Managing team cohesion when working flexibly</u>	This tip sheet provides key points on how to keep your team together when working flexibly. It's only for teams where individual employees work elsewhere for around two days per week. Use the guide for dispersed teams if the number of days elsewhere is higher.
10. <u>Managing performance when working flexibly</u>	This tip sheet provides guidance for managers to distinguish between job performance and flexible work performance; and to set expectations about both.
11. <u>Protocols for working out of the office</u>	This tip sheet provides some guidelines for remote working.

Other flexible working resources

Resource	Overview
<u>Managing a dispersed team</u>	This guide is designed for managers who oversee a group of employees who work as a team but from different locations on a more formal and regular basis.
<u>Making flexibility work for everyone: a conversation guide for employees</u>	This guide is intended to help employees to negotiate a flexible working arrangement, make it successful, or resolve it if it is not working.
<u>Building a flexible working culture: a conversation guide for managers</u>	As above, but designed for managers.

For more information
visit the **PSC website**.

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FLEXIBLE WORKING

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