

OPEN SPACE OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS

Planning for Efficiency and Comfort
in the Workplace



New York State Office of General Services
Real Estate Planning and Development





What is open space office planning?

Open space office environments embrace the concept of ergonomic design by using furniture systems to maximize work efficiency and employee comfort. Open office planning was developed as a means of providing organizational flexibility, promoting interactions among people in different units, and supporting a team concept. An open office significantly reduces the number of private offices and distributes staff throughout the space in workstation groups. Offices and conference rooms are situated in the center of the floor to allow the staff to work by perimeter windows to access natural light. In addition, the furniture systems use lower panel heights to improve lighting and the circulation of heat and air conditioning.

Benefits include:

- Encouragement of conversation and collaboration between employees;
- Increased access to natural light and outdoor views;
- Improved air quality and circulation;
- Ability to support and accommodate advances in technology;
- Economy of storage and usable work space;
- Easy access to storage and surrounding facilities;
- Increased comfort and convenience;
- Improved office morale and employee productivity;
- Reduced square footage requirements with the associated real estate cost savings; and
- Enhanced aesthetics—office appears orderly and attractive.

How does open office design address privacy concerns?

In the past, state agencies use the enclosed office as a means of establishing status for their managers, without evaluating the actual need for privacy. By reevaluating each employee's title and responsibilities, status can be provided to a majority of private office holders by the design or size of their workstation. As such, privacy needs must be balanced throughout the group. Most employees do not need privacy continually throughout their day. For employees who have only occasional requirements for privacy, small, enclosed rooms called "enclaves" are provided. Employees are encouraged to use these rooms for confidential meetings and personal phone calls. In addition, acoustical privacy can be enhanced with the use of special carpeting and acoustical systems panels. In some cases, white noise can be introduced as well as acoustical ceiling tiles.

What are the steps involved in planning an open office?

1. Discuss and analyze the affected agency or work unit body to understand the way it functions. This may present an opportunity for a group to reorganize or validate its processes and structure.
2. Determine the logical and most efficient office layout based on how the group works, or should work. Design the work stations and office layout.
3. Select a systems furniture vendor through the bidding process or from an existing state contract. Make choices for carpet, paint and workstation materials to achieve a coordinated décor and set the tone for the unit.

How is systems furniture purchased?

The process for purchasing modular furniture ensures that agencies obtain the best workstation at the best price to suit their needs. Vendors are invited to participate by providing workstation designs based on the agency's need. The mock-up workstations are then evaluated by the agency's criteria. The best two or three vendors are then requested to submit pricing for the project and the low bid vendor is chosen for the furniture purchase.

If a landlord is purchasing the furniture as part of a lease agreement, the landlord is advised when the agency has decided on a vendor. At this point, the landlord assumes responsibility for placing the order, overseeing the delivery of the order to the site, ensuring the completeness of the order, and installing of the workstations. Typically, the consultant preparing the layouts is also responsible for developing a color scheme for the space. Two "color boards" are usually offered, with colors suggested for both architectural elements such as walls and floors, as well as for workstations and miscellaneous furniture. This results in an office environment that is aesthetically pleasing as well as functional.

Contact the Office of General Services for professional support

The Office of General Services' Real Estate Planning staff has the experience and expertise to guide state agencies through the transition to an open space office environment, including:

- Knowledge of multiple vendors on state contract;
- Understanding of agencies mission and goals; and
- In-house planning and design capabilities.

Please contact the OGS Real Estate Planning unit to discuss the possibility of an open space design for your next move or space renovation.

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