



Cornell University

Office Space Guidelines

Approved by the Space Use Advisory Committee; January 19, 2017

INTENT

These guidelines were developed to help all units of the University, exclusive of Weill Cornell Medicine, plan for and allocate office space in accordance with the Cornell University Space Management Principles¹ approved by the Capital Funding & Priorities Committee on April 24, 2012.

Actual allocations of existing space within a unit's overall allocation will ultimately be based on many considerations, including overall building context, adjacencies, design features unique to the structure, and roles and responsibilities of individuals.

For renovations and new construction projects, project managers in Facilities and Campus Services and the units will refer to this document when working with project stakeholders and architects during the design phase. For renovations of existing space, building constraints may require adaptation of these guidelines. Exceptions to the guidelines, for whatever reason, will require approval through the project approval process. That is, all signatories on Project Approval Requests will need to support the exceptions. In New York State facilities, SUNY space guidelines, available through project management, must also be considered.

These guidelines can also be used to measure existing allocations of space through analyses that compare assigned space to models based on headcounts and position classifications. An illustration of the model is included in Appendix A.

Academic and administrative units should ensure that any unit-specific space policies or guidelines align with the information provided in this document.

SPACE-PER-PERSON

Space-per-person guidelines identify the maximum assignable square footage² (ASF) allocation per person in a specific role. The Cornell guidelines are included in Appendix B, Table 1 (for staff and union positions), Appendix C, Table 2 (for faculty and academic non-faculty positions), and Appendix D, Table 3 (for student and temporary positions).

Guideline allocations are targets. They are not a guarantee that an employee or affiliate of the University will receive a specific office type or amount of square footage. In fact, the square footage

¹ These Principles can be found on the Space Planning Resources page at <https://dbp.cornell.edu/home/space-planning/resources/>

² Assignable square footage is that within building walls that is usable by people or programs. The net assignable area (measured as Net Assignable Square Feet, NASF) is the sum of the assignable spaces in a building or program area.

numbers are rarely used when making individual or limited decisions regarding office allocations. These numbers are most typically used when planning or modeling a space for an entire unit or group, in which case the individual allocations are summed to determine a unit space footprint.

Furthermore, the targets (both square footage and office type) are often difficult to achieve in existing spaces that are not under renovation, as historical allocations and existing structural layouts constrain the ability to optimize allocations. Targets become easier to achieve during renovations and through new construction, although all such projects are a series of compromises between scope and budget and may not always result in fully achieving the guidelines. The goal of office space allocation and reallocation efforts is to align with the guidelines as closely as possible within external constraints of structure and budget, to inform decision-making, and to attempt to achieve equity across similar positions within the University.

ACHIEVING OFFICE ALLOCATIONS THROUGH A VARIETY OF SPACE TYPES

During any reallocation of existing office space, or opportunity to renovate or build new, the need for open plan and/or forms of shared office space versus private office space must be critically evaluated by the project team, including functional unit leadership. It is always an option for unit leadership to decide to allocate more shared and/or more open space and less private space than suggested in the guidelines. Discussion and decisions regarding the type(s) of space to provide should occur before space programs are developed.

The provision of private office space, defined as having one primary occupant, is generally determined by the role, as noted in the allocation tables in the appendices. Private space is generally considered that with hard walls that extend from floor to ceiling.

Shared offices are spaces that will meet the needs of up to four individuals. For positions assigned to shared space, the allocations in the Tables represent the amount of office space that should be provided to one of the positions in the shared space, not the actual size of the shared office. For example, two individuals in technical support roles (allocated at 80 square feet per person of shared space, see Appendix B) might be assigned to share one 160 square feet office space.

Open plan offices are those that are designed to meet the needs of five or more individuals and/or to serve the reception needs of a unit. These spaces are commonly identified as suites; the suite may contain other functions besides individual desk space, such as office support space and reception. In open plan office space, the actual workstation size may be smaller than the office guideline allocation, given that some of the space need is met in the circulation and other amenities within the suite area.

Provision of open plan offices and shared offices is an efficient use of space if planned well in terms of the layout and fit of furniture and when the need to accommodate meetings, in-person collaborations, and private conversations can be met through shared access to small meeting rooms (also known as team rooms, huddle rooms, etc.). Allocations per role may remain the same within shared or open plan space or may decrease with a compensatory increase in office support space. That is, unit leadership may decide to move square footage allocations from individual workstation spaces to shared meeting and other support spaces.

Workstations in shared and open plan offices are provided through furniture solutions that may or may not include panels, commonly referred to as cubicle walls. Panels can be purchased in a range of heights and can be stacked, so that cubicle walls can be formed that extend above average height people. Generally, most office designs will have better aesthetics and functionality if panel systems are

kept below 48-52". Panels should not be provided to give the appearance of privacy to individuals and roles for which open and shared offices are recommended.

Shared workstations are used in situations where several to many individuals need a desk to complete a task of the same type and with the same equipment as others performing the same role. Shared workstations may be used in situations where the individual's time at the desk is limited, or where more than one person serves in the same function within an office area. Examples include police officers sharing a dispatch workstation, building care employees sharing a computer workstation, or students sharing a supervisor role in an Athletics facility.

Supervisors should assess office space needs by role to determine if staff working in a hybrid arrangement, as determined through HR policy and process, continue to have a dedicated desk/office on campus or if they will have hoteling or other shared space arrangements. The need to retain a dedicated space for a hybrid employee should be compelling.

In some cases, the guidelines extrapolate to more space than is required to fulfill the limited office needs of the unit, for example, where a few workstations or computers in a community center can meet the needs of many employees. In such cases, as in all space allocations, judgement should be used in right-sizing the space solution to the true needs of the workforce.

SUPPORT SPACE

Office space considerations must always include the need for conference and meeting rooms as well as space for office service functions, such as kitchenette and break areas, copier and equipment space, supply storage and file space. The allocation tables in appendices B, C and D include the guidelines for assignable square footage of support space per role. This space, as with the office space itself, is allocated to roles and then aggregated for all roles within a shared work area or unit.

Support space may be shared between units within a building. Teams for renovation projects within buildings with shared support spaces should evaluate the adequacy of building-wide support spaces when applying these guidelines.

EMERITUS FACULTY OFFICES

An emeritus faculty member actively engaged in teaching or research may retain a private office at the discretion of the unit, if space is available. Emeritus faculty who remain engaged in unit activities but not to the extent of specific teaching or research responsibilities may be provided shared or open plan office space if space is available within a unit. These shared offices are intended to allow an individual to maintain contact with the unit, discipline, and colleagues.

MULTIPLE OFFICES

Individuals should not be assigned more than one office space unless there is a demonstrated need. Faculty with executive or senior administrative duties, faculty with joint appointments, and individuals with responsibilities in more than one building, especially when located at a distance, may be assigned a secondary workspace, provided it is not located within the same building as the primary office.

A department chair office in an administrative suite should be modest (in the range of 100-120 square feet) and sufficient for private work and meetings with only one or two other individuals. Meeting space associated with the chair's function should be provided in a separate modest (100-120 square

feet) meeting space within or near the administrative suite, in a way that can be accessed by others within the department administration without going through the department chair's private office.

EXTENDED USES OF OFFICES

In general, except at the most senior levels of administration, offices should not serve as conference and meeting rooms for groups of more than 3-4 people. Meeting spaces and other functions, such as dry lab space, should be separately partitioned from office workspace in order to accommodate utilization by others when the primary occupant is absent.

USE OF UNOCCUPIED OFFICES

When offices are left unoccupied for significant periods of time, due to sabbaticals, other leaves, or changing workspace requirements, units should consider other uses for these spaces, especially to relieve space pressures or to provide for extra small group meeting space.

UPDATES AND PERIODIC REVIEW

The HR Subject Specialist in Human Resources and Space Planning will coordinate keeping the appendices of this document as current as reasonable.

On a periodic basis, the Director of Space Planning will be responsible for consulting with stakeholders and recommending to the Space Use Advisory Committee any revisions to this document.

CONTACT

Director of Capital & Space Planning | 607-255-2557 | spaceplanning@cornell.edu

Revision Tracking

July 2024: Update hyperlink

May 2023: Clarified department chair office guidelines in Multiple Offices section and Appendix C; Clarified consideration of private office space for graduate field coordinators in Appendix B (endorsed by Space Use Advisory Committee 5/15/23)

August 2022: Add context for staff in hybrid roles (endorsed by Space Use Advisory Committee 8/22/22)

February 2022: Clarify applicability