

# From Lease to Launch: The 2026 Melbourne Office Fitout Guide

A practical, numbers-backed guide to choosing, designing and delivering a workplace your team loves.



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# Everyone Should Have a Beautiful Office to Work In

”

A message from Karl Simity  
Managing Director, Canopy Fitouts

At Canopy, we've always believed one thing: we spend too much time at work for an office to be uninspiring.

Over the past few years, we've seen the workplace evolve faster than ever before. Even with rising construction costs and a cautious economic climate, businesses are choosing to reinvest in their spaces — not out of obligation, but out of opportunity.

Here in Melbourne, you can feel the shift happening.

In 2026, businesses are starting to take up office space again, over 100,000 square metres of it. To me, that says people are ready for better workplaces. Not just bigger or newer, but more inspiring places where teams actually enjoy spending time.

In this guide, we share the practical steps, real costs, timelines, and design trends shaping office fitouts in 2026. Whether you're exploring a relocation, resizing, or refreshing your existing office, our goal is to give you clarity and to show what's possible when a space truly supports the people inside it.

# What Your Staff Want From an Office

Teams are returning to the office, but with higher expectations. We are seeing a real push for quality spaces, flexibility with a focus on wellbeing and a blend of "home-like" comfort.

More and more we are seeing teams wanting to come in, and when they do, they want the space to resonate and provide all the items they can't get from being at home. These include: collaboration spaces, flexible work zones, and high-quality breakout spaces with comfortable, modular furniture designed for interpersonal connection. The fitout needs to provide a space that encourages these behaviours.

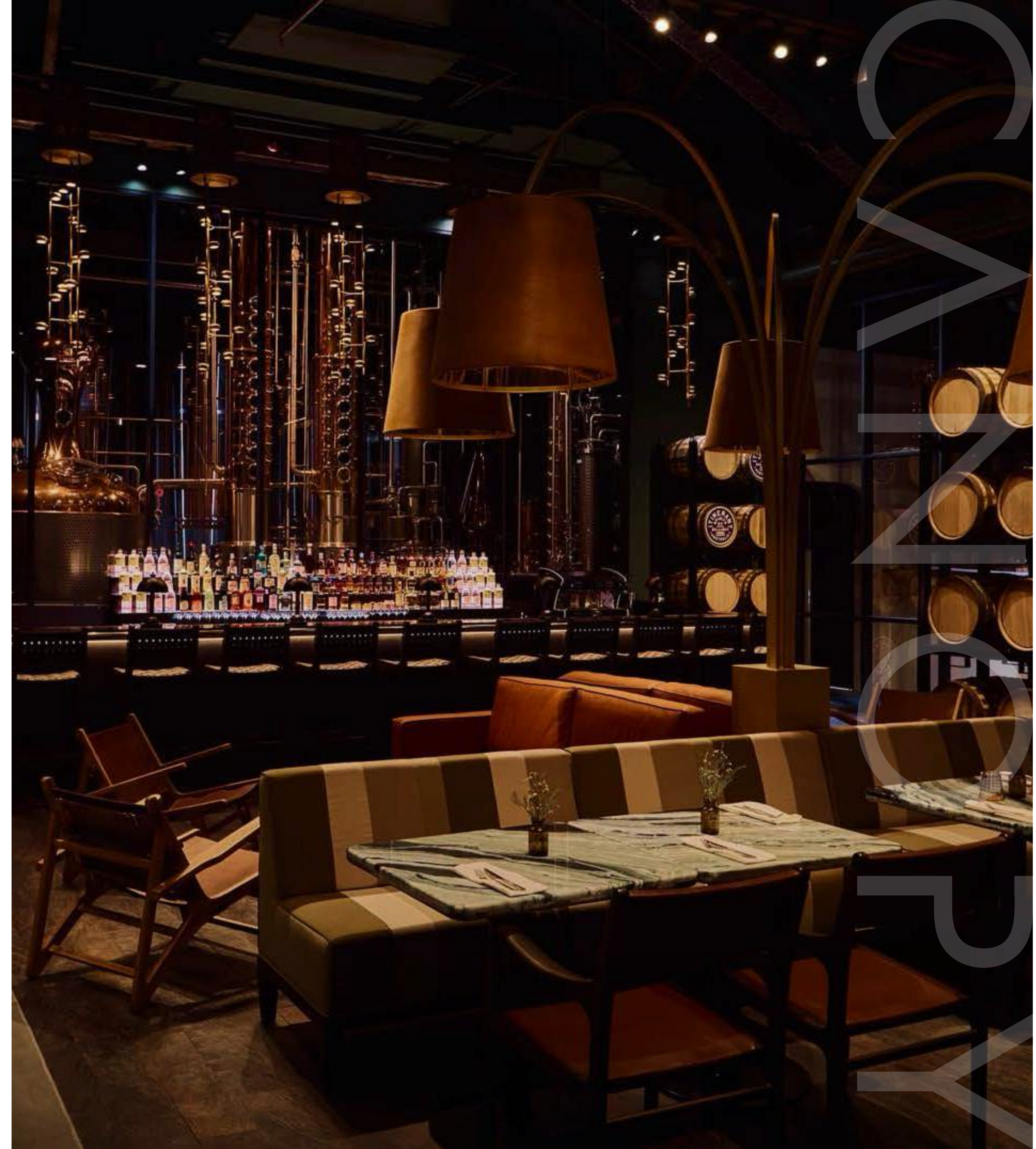
Businesses encouraging greater in-office attendance must also ensure that the facilities, culture, and design create an experience that keeps staff coming back.

**In this white paper, you'll learn how to find, design, and build a space that meets all of these needs, along with industry-specific insights on budgeting for an office fitout.**

Not sure what your team needs most?

Staff surveys and utilisation studies can help you determine the right design. Click below to learn how to strategically set your team up for a successful move.

[How to Implement a Workplace Strategy →](#)





# Your Roadmap

## 6 Essential Steps to Help You Find the Right Space for Your Fitout.

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# Moving office should be fun, and a change of office is as good as a holiday.

Following these fundamental steps will ensure the process runs smoothly, whether you're a team of 10 or 100.



## 1

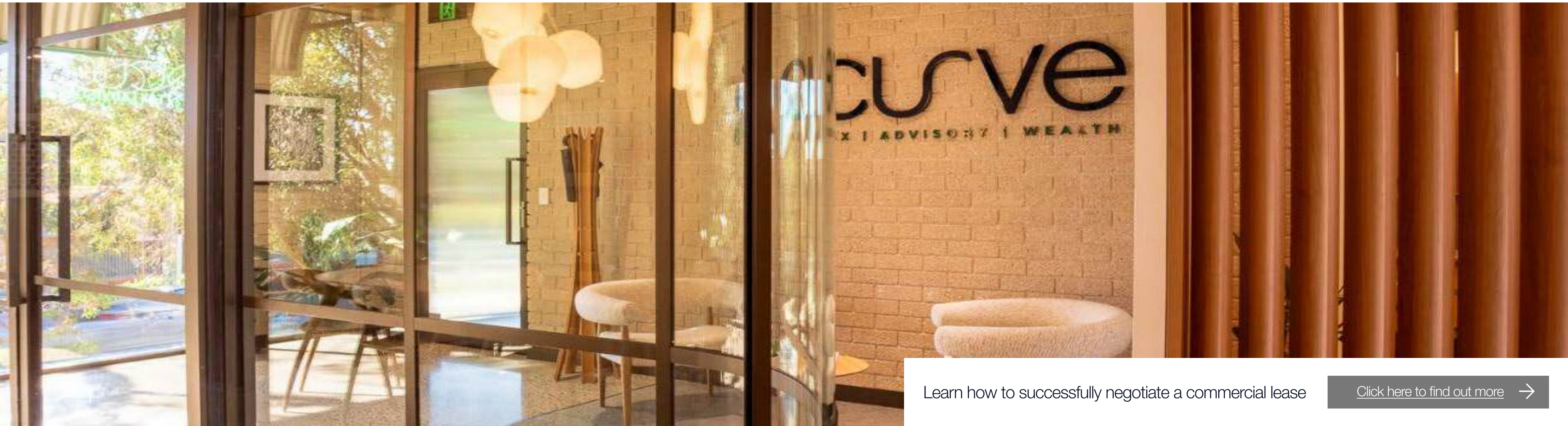
# Pre-relocation and lease negotiation

The last position you want to get yourself into is to wait until your current lease is almost up before you start looking. Start searching at least 6 months before your lease ends. This will give you enough time to negotiate your term from a place of strength. It also gives your fitout partner enough time to identify potential cost drivers early.

Engage reputable property advisers and use every resource available to get the best outcome.



**Tip: Engage your fitout partner early. Canopy Fitouts regularly assists clients before a lease is signed to identify hidden costs before a project commences.**



Learn how to successfully negotiate a commercial lease

[Click here to find out more](#) →

## 2

# How Much Space? Use The Power of 12

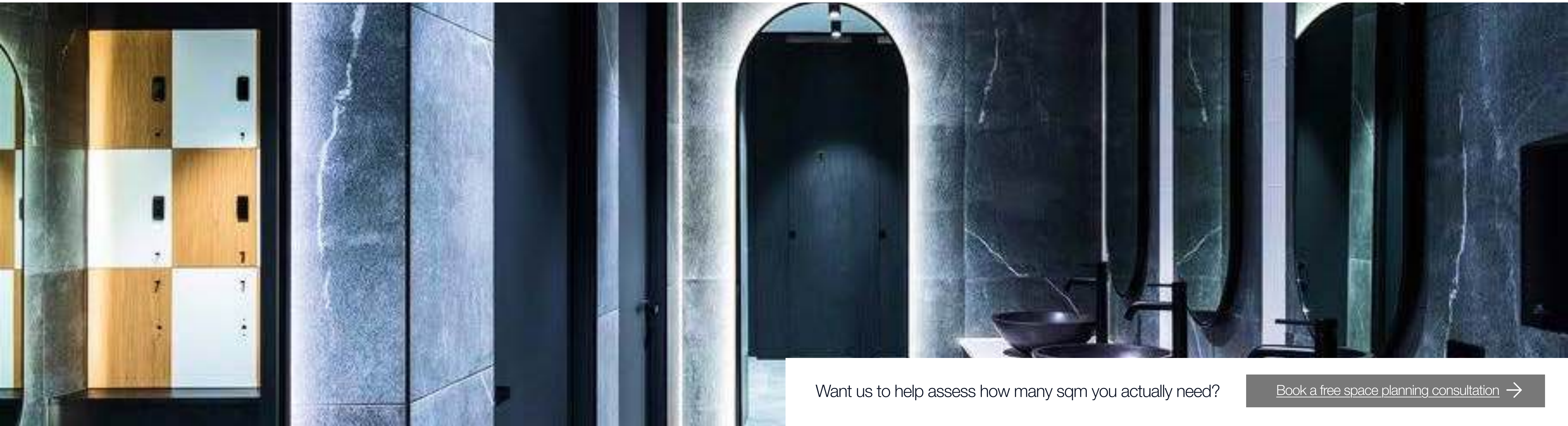
As a general guide, plan for 1 person per 12 sqm.

→ 1 per 10 sqm aligns with common Australian design standards

→ 1 per 7 sqm is typical for call centres and customer service offices

→ 1 per 14 sqm is generous

12 sqm per person is a solid middle-ground for most businesses across various industries.



Want us to help assess how many sqm you actually need?

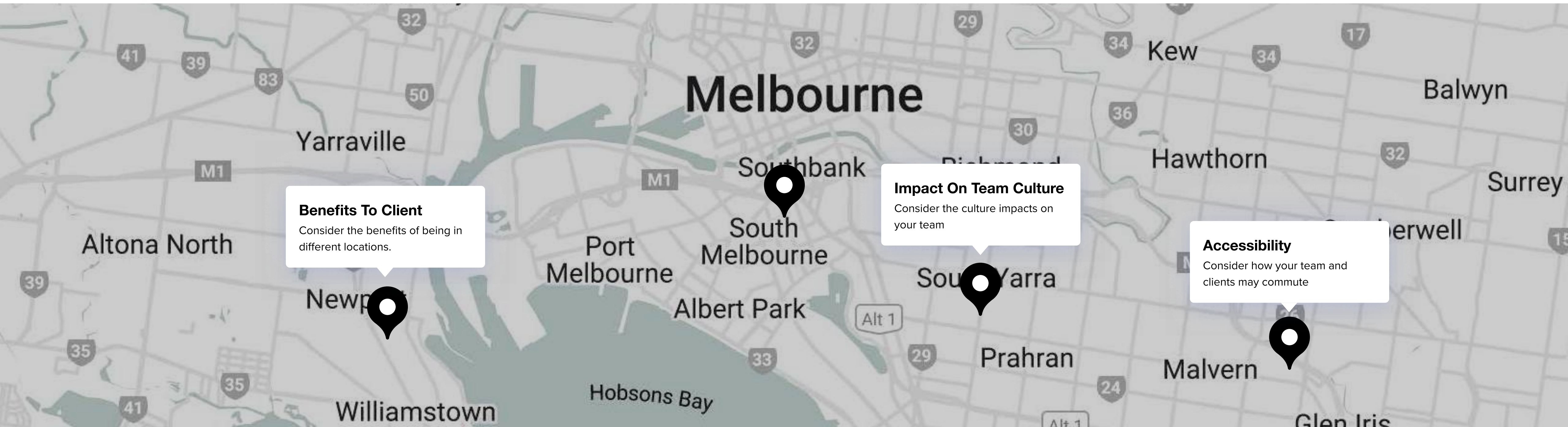
[Book a free space planning consultation](#) →

## 3

## Finding the Right Location

Consider what location you need to be and the impact this may have on the business and your staff if you went to a different area. Being open-minded about the location you choose can help you find the right space at the right terms, but how might a different location impact your staff and daily operations? Consider:

- Commuting patterns
- Cultural impacts on your team (if moving to a new suburb)
- Client convenience
- Access and nearby amenities (e.g. is it close to public transport and major roads? Are there good cafes and places to eat nearby?)



## 4

## Ways to Finance Your Fitout

There are many ways to structure a lease — from incentives and fitout amortisation to reworking an existing space. At this stage, it's important to understand your ongoing costs and fitout budget so you can secure a location that's within budget and offers the right terms.

Generally, the longer the lease, the stronger the fitout incentives. But think beyond today — consider what your business will look like at the end of the term. The goal is balance: too much space wastes money, too little limits growth.

### A Note on Working With Landlords

Landlords range from mum-and-dad investors to large property groups, and their priorities — and flexibility — differ. Some can offer upfront cash incentives, while others may prefer rent-free periods instead.

If you stay flexible, you'll negotiate better terms. There's always some give and take — and usually a way to structure a deal that works for both sides.



Learn about 5 ways to finance your fitout

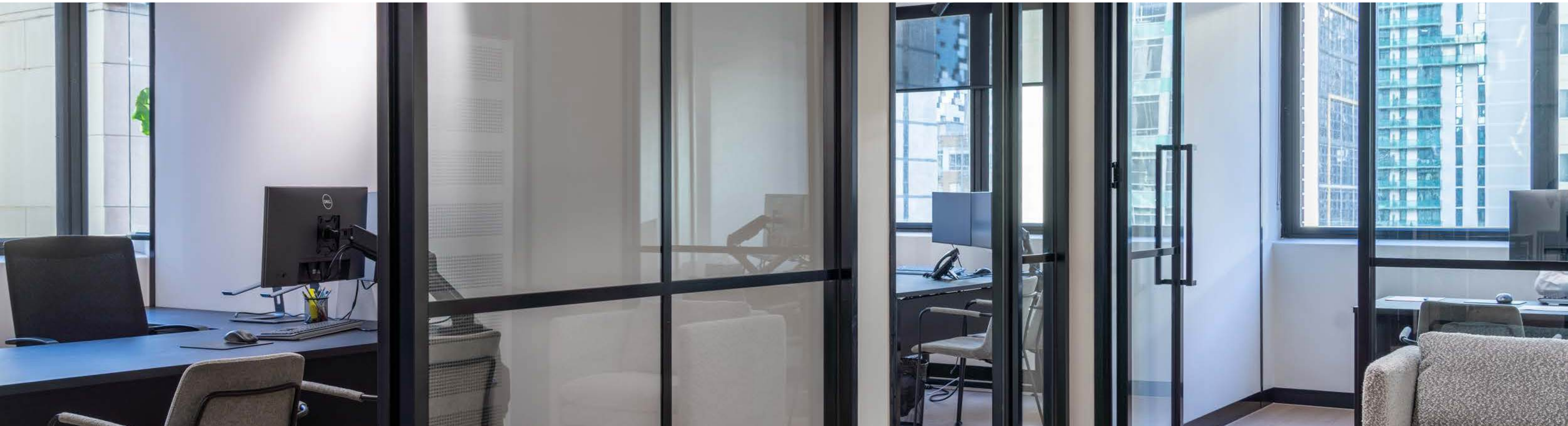
[Click here to find out more](#) →

## 5

## Requirements

It's good to have a checklist of the requirements you need, something as basic as knowing how many offices, meeting spaces, and workstations will help keep it front of mind when inspecting properties.

Have a style and look you are aiming for? Do you want to be seen as cool/edgy? Or are you after a modern/corporate look? Even a couple of ideas about the work culture you'd like to create will help narrow down a space.



## 6

## The Shortlist

Once you have managed to get a shortlist of spaces together, it is vital to figure out which ones tick all the right boxes.

Just because the space might have the correct square meters, it doesn't mean it's the right fit for your team. No two buildings are the same, and no buildings will have the same amount of usable area.

It's important to engage with a fitout design specialist to get a couple of test fit plans done to work with the basic requirements that you've prepared. There is a huge advantage in doing this upfront, and actually knowing the basics of what your fitout will look like will enable you to make better decisions on the final space. Additionally, it gives you something to engage with the landlord about. Having visibility on how you are going to use the space will give the landlord confidence that you are committed to working with them.





# The New Rules of Workplace Design

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# Flexible & Modular Spaces

Hybrid work isn't going anywhere. And with office attendance higher than pre-pandemic levels, we envision workspaces incorporating more functionality into their fitouts.

This means more multipurpose spaces that transform from hot desking to collaborative setups and even boardroom layouts. Modular furniture will allow spaces to expand and contract depending on how many people are in the office at a given time.



# Inclusive Design

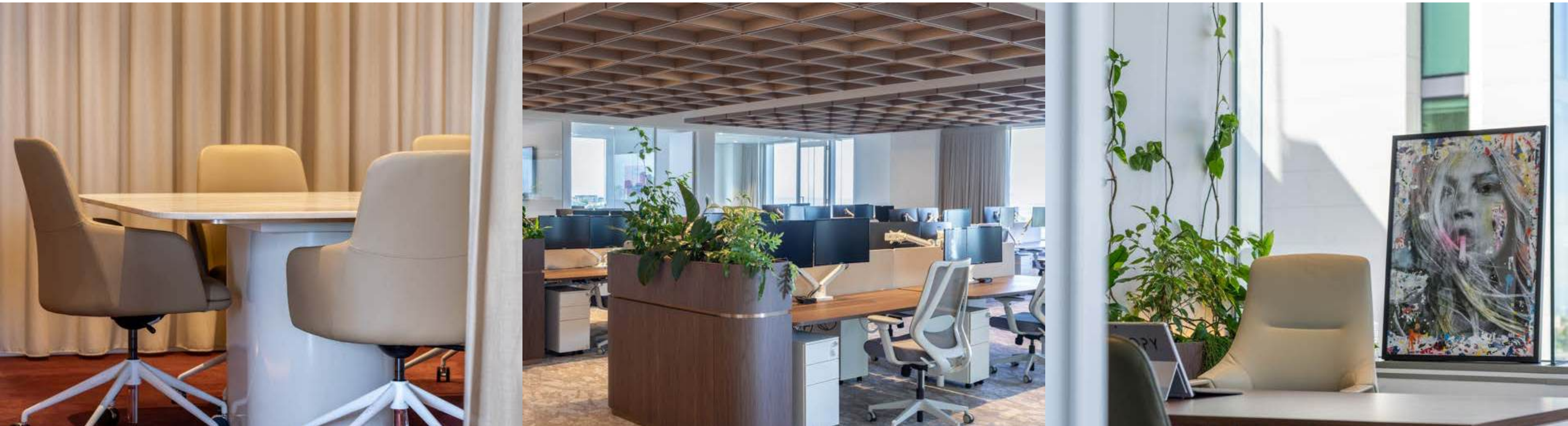
Traditional offices carry a strong sense of hierarchy. Managers are locked behind closed doors with glazed windows. Mid-level employees are blocked into soundproof cubicles. Different departments work on different floors, and the CEO is probably in a different area entirely.

The open plan office has single-handedly levelled the playing field between upper and lower management for modern teams. Having accessible management makes a powerful statement about a company's culture. But inclusive design isn't simply about tearing down the walls and adding more hot desks.

We're seeing more businesses include:

- Meditation and quiet spaces
- Ergonomic standing desks and chairs for different types of workers
- More natural light (or natural-like lighting)

***93% of workers would stay longer at companies that offer healthier workspace benefits such as wellness areas, ergonomic seating and sit-to-stand desks. - Forbes***



# Personal Spaces Are Back

Open-plan offices shaped the modern office landscape. Tried and tested across many industries, it has its advantages, but there are some drawbacks. These drawbacks are particularly apparent when it comes to performing solo work.

Without private spaces, it's extremely difficult for individuals to work productively in spaces built entirely around communication and collaboration.

This year, we believe that businesses will take into consideration all types of work styles when designing their fitouts. This could play out as more personal, private offices set up on the outskirts of open collaborative spaces and more designated quiet spaces.



# Mental Health & Wellbeing

Work blends into the home. The home blends back into the office. In 2026, there's very little separation between the two. As personal and professional life becomes more blurry, many are prioritising mental health and wellbeing to stay balanced and avoid burnout.

To meet the needs of an ever-transforming workforce, fitouts will be designed to promote employee wellbeing.

Breakout spaces will be designed around comfort, allowing individuals to fully decompress during break times.

Office kitchen spaces will feel even more homely with casual seating, fully operational kitchens, and entertaining spaces. With plants and greenery shown to reduce stress and improve mood, we will see more and more greenery in the office space.



# Finding a Balance Between Hybrid & Traditional

We're in a transitional state of office fitout design.

Business owners want the versatility of open-plan layouts, yet they understand that it's not a one-size-fits-all solution.

Open-plan layouts tend to be louder and borderline unproductive for more introverted workers.

On the other end of the spectrum, completely traditional offices can separate teams, reduce camaraderie, and discourage collaboration and idea sharing.

It will be front of mind for designers who will look to incorporate traditional elements alongside functional hybrid office designs to meet the needs of every worker.



# Colour Trends

Interior fit-out colour trends are shifting toward warm, grounded, and earthy tones like mossy greens, deep teals, soft browns, and warm-toned neutrals such as taupe, beige, and creamy whites. These are paired with sophisticated pops of bold, saturated colours, including deep reds, rich berry hues, and bright butter yellows, for depth and personality.

The trends emphasise a return to nature, comfort, and psychological well-being, creating spaces that are both serene and expressive.

We are really excited about colours and tones heading more and more into Australiana, rainforest greens, sandy browns and yellows and rich earthy reds; emphasising the strength of the colours of the Australian environment and bringing in that depth of warmth and connection to office spaces.

**Need help with design ideas? Our interior designers can produce a custom palette based on your brand and culture**





# Fitout Costs

## What It Takes to Build a Great Office

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## Overview

For most business managers, fitting out their office space can be seen as a costly but necessary investment. There is a direct link between staff productivity and their work environment. In fact, Forbes reported that 93% of survey respondents would stay longer at a company that would offer healthier workspace benefits such as wellness areas, ergonomic seating and sit-to-stand desks.

Office fitouts can come in all shapes and sizes, and how much a business should spend is entirely dependent on its unique needs and requirements.

So perhaps a better place to start is, **'how do I determine a budget for my office fitout?'** In the following section, we'll share our tips to help you get a rough idea of how much your new office fitout might cost.

# Setting Your Budget

When first budgeting for an office fitout, it's important to factor in the costs of all elements involved in delivering the fitout from start to finish. To help our clients understand where exactly their money is being spent, we've coined the **40/30/30 Rule**.

- Furniture, such as desks, workstations or chairs, will make up about 40% of your budget.
- The construction of enclosed rooms, such as quiet rooms or meeting rooms, will make up around 30% of your budget.
- The remaining 30% will cover hidden services – such as heating and cooling, fire protection and cabling.



# Costing Per Square Meter

As a general rule of thumb, we suggest allocating **\$1200-\$1700 per square meter** for a "warm shell" space (carpet and ceilings already in).

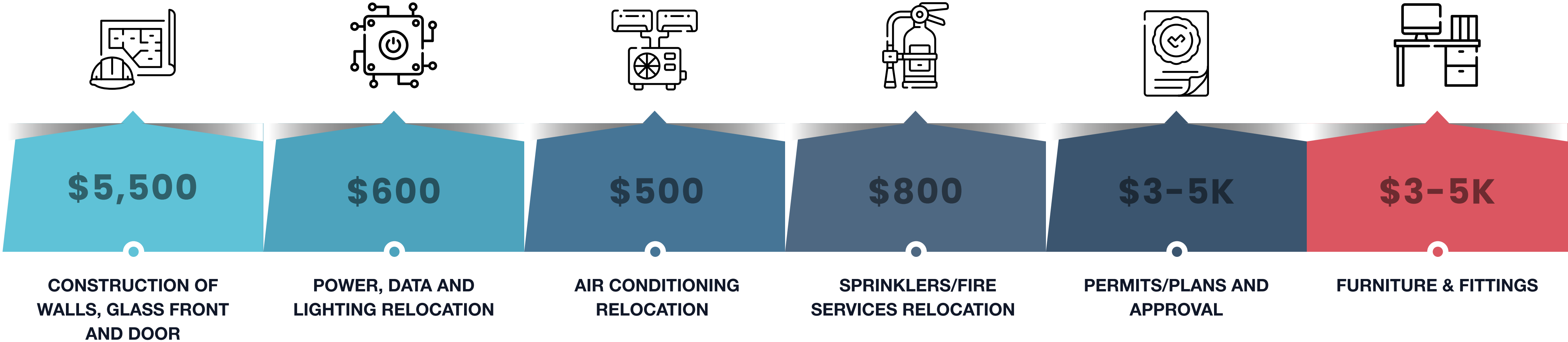
On the lower end of this range, your fitout may consist of more moderate finishes – such as laminate surfaces, limited joinery, as well as simple lighting and furniture.

At the higher end of this range, you may expect more premium finishes across materials.



# Cost of Rooms

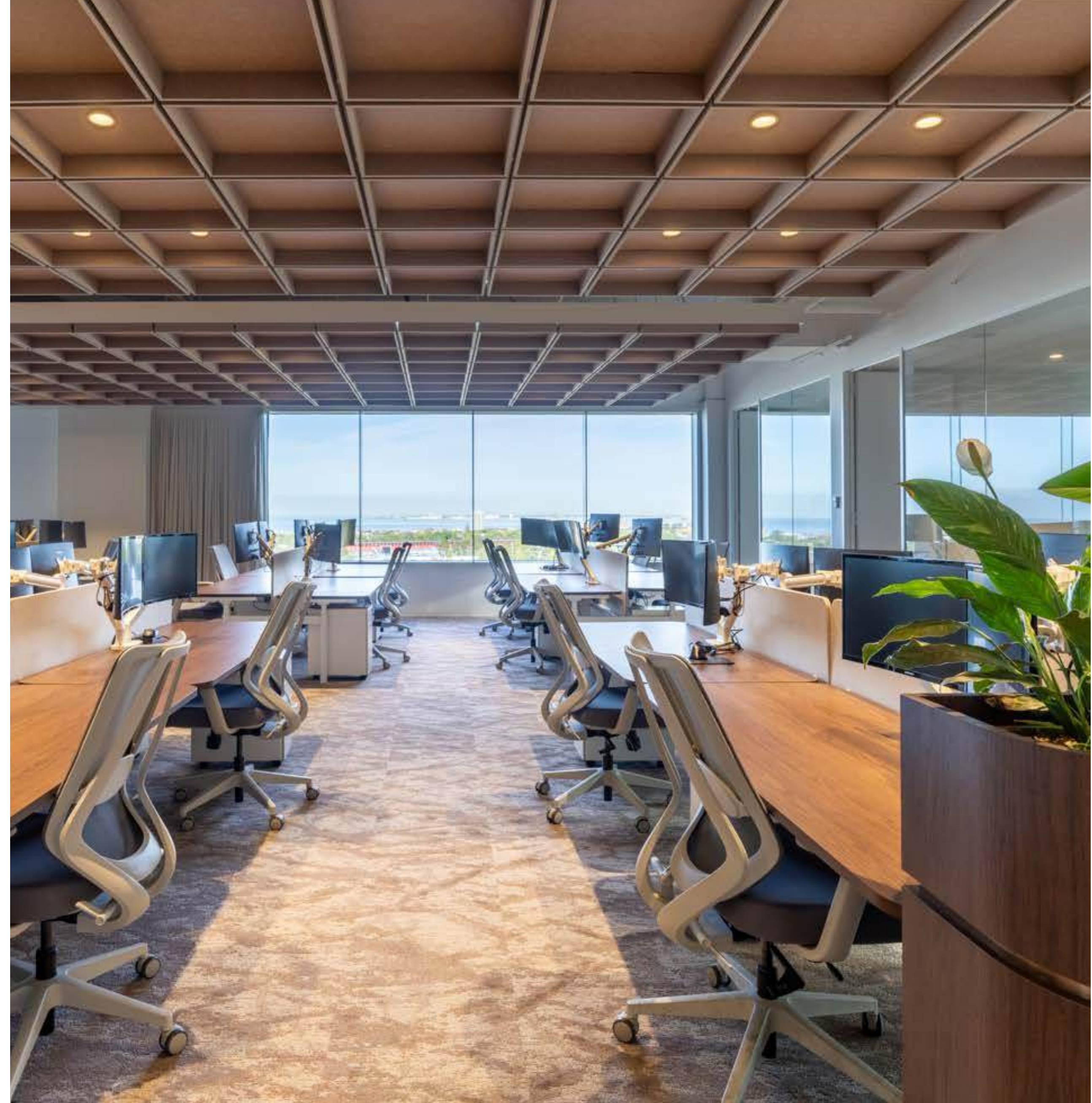
For many businesses in 2026, private collaborative spaces and offices have become a necessity in an office fitout. These can be costly, with the physical build of a standalone room costing **at least \$7,000** once you consider the costs of the services.



# Floor and Ceiling Fitout Costs

While you're looking for your new office space, you may find that the existing flooring and ceiling are not in a desirable condition.

Since these can consume a large volume of area, we suggest adding an extra **\$160 per square meter** to cover new flooring and ceiling tile replacement.



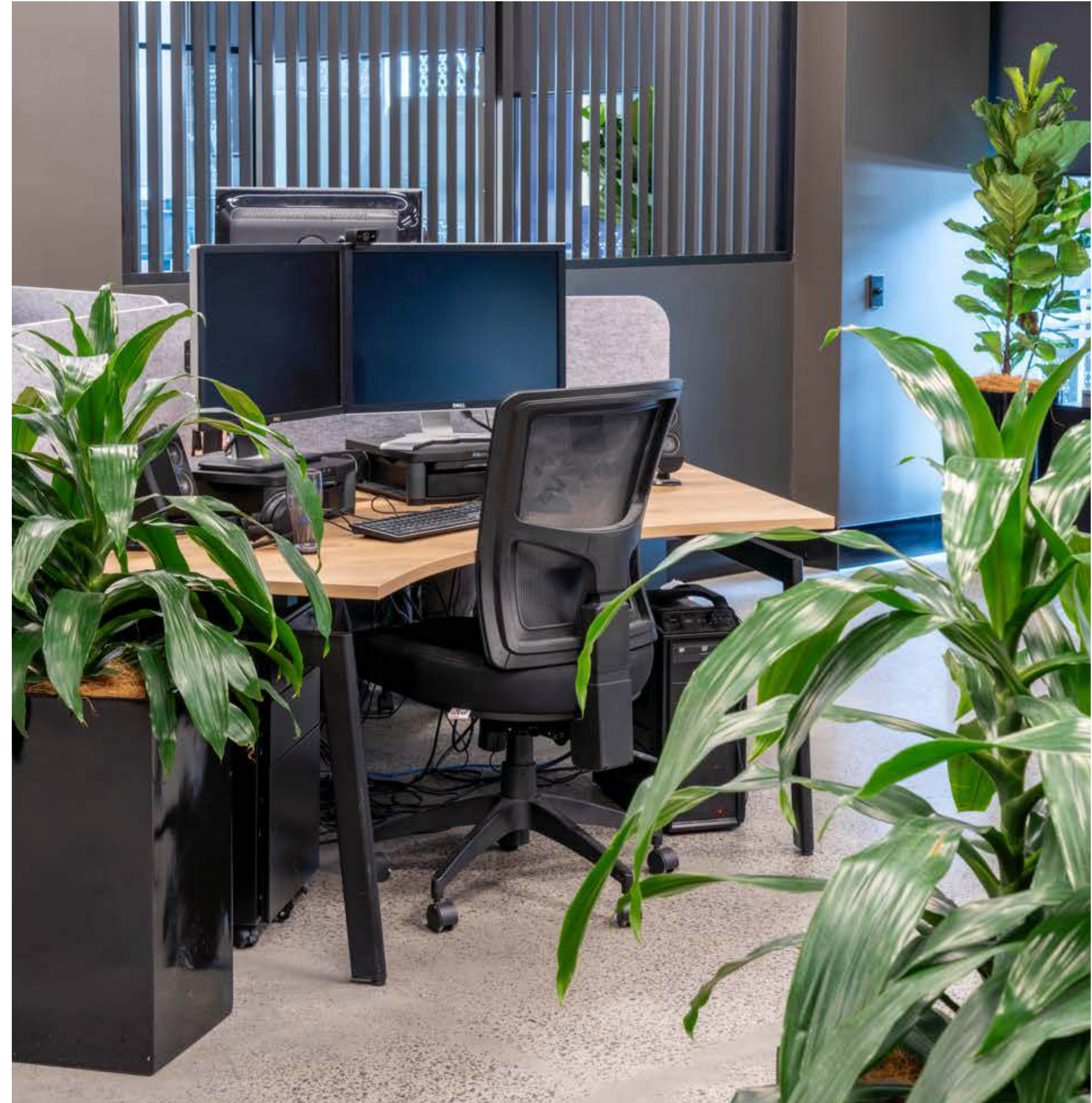
# Workstations and Cost Per Person

The cost of your office fitout can vary depending on how many staff members you have and, therefore, the work points you will need. But what most people overlook is the true costs required to install these. While a workstation and chair may total \$1500, the power and data cabling can exceed \$500 per workstation.

Not sure how much space your team will need?

This guide will help you pick the right-sized space for your team:

[Click here to find out more](#) →



# Don't Get Caught by These 3 Traps

You can budget your project down to the finest detail, but some costs have a way of slipping past even the most budget-savvy business owners. Here are 3 things we tell our clients to look out for before commencing any project.

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## SITE SELECTION

Fitouts are complicated beasts; a normal construction site for us would typically have 8 service contractors, multiple construction components, ceilings, stud work, plaster, glass, and frame, and sometimes more than ten specialty furniture suppliers. Empty shells require even more work, as we're essentially building from scratch.

If you're on a budget, shortlist sites that have most essential services already installed. This way, you can direct your budget towards the items that you really want. Taking a space that already has a ceiling, carpet and services in place is a great start.

## ESSENTIAL SERVICES

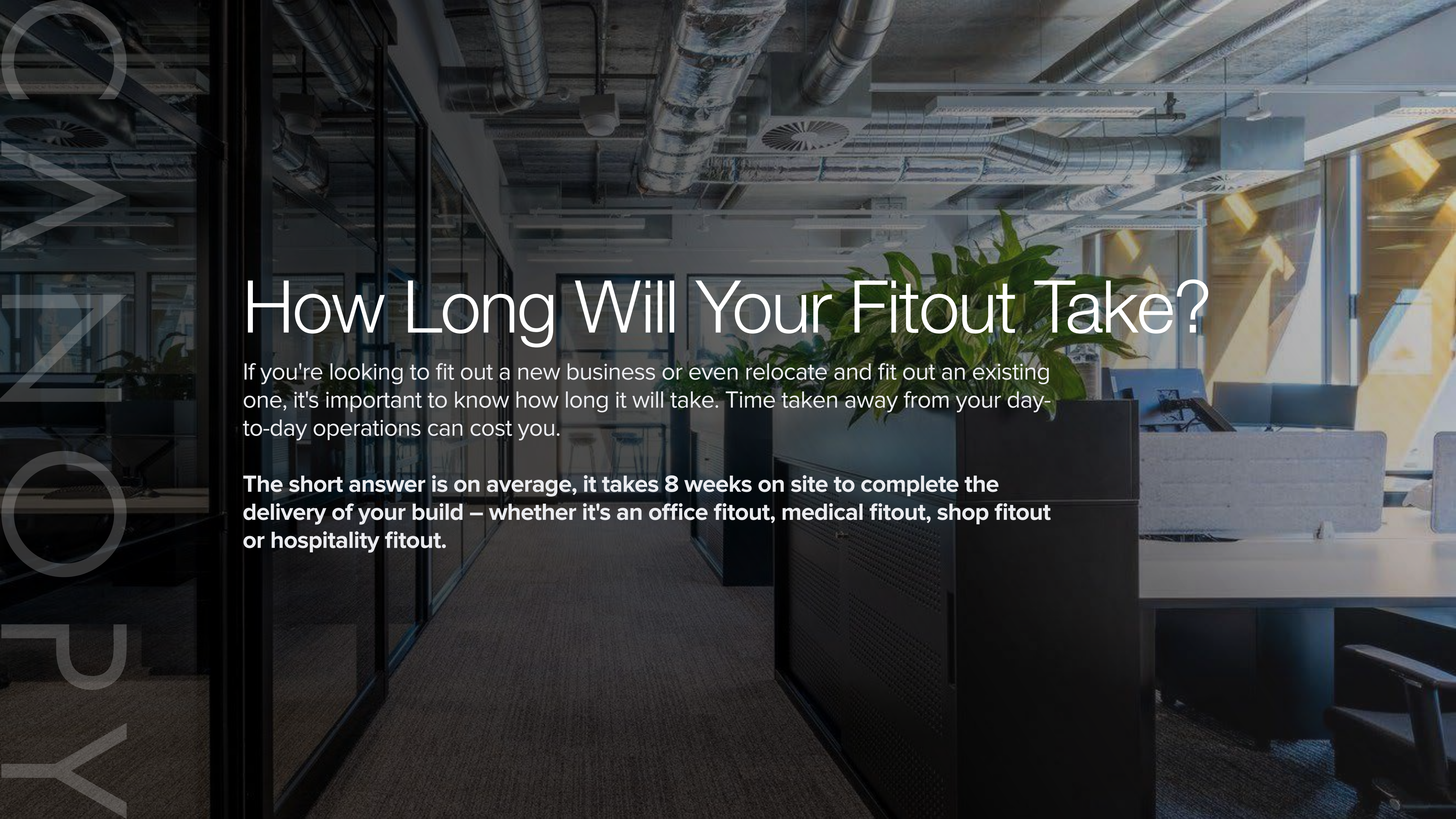
Services can be really expensive. Remember that 30% of your costs will go to things you can't see, so making sure they are in place and only adjustments are needed—rather than new ones to be installed—is critical.

New mechanical services can be expensive (around \$250 per square meter), especially in an office tower with approvals and cranes, etc. If a space has a ceiling in it, make sure the fire and mechanical services have been installed, and only alterations are needed.

## BATHROOMS & KITCHENS

If you have ever done a home renovation, you will know that bathrooms and kitchens are the most expensive areas of your house. Now, you need to consider that, but with full commercial fittings, compliance in a more challenging environment with loading, lifts and confirmed spaces. Ideally, look for a space that has all the necessary bathrooms to suit your needs, along with kitchen and tea points in place or at least roughed in to avoid core holes, slab scans and expensive plumbing solutions.

**Strong leasing incentives can offset many of these costs. Just go in with eyes open and ready to negotiate if you truly love the space**



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# How Long Will Your Fitout Take?

If you're looking to fit out a new business or even relocate and fit out an existing one, it's important to know how long it will take. Time taken away from your day-to-day operations can cost you.

**The short answer is on average, it takes 8 weeks on site to complete the delivery of your build – whether it's an office fitout, medical fitout, shop fitout or hospitality fitout.**

## Other Considerations

While a fitout can take 8 weeks, things like project complexity, property condition, availability of resources, and permit approvals time can delay your fitout significantly. Keeping these factors in mind, work with your fitout partner to get the most accurate timeline before works commence, and plan for contingencies in case things don't go as expected.

The complexity of your project will lengthen (or shorten) the time it takes. To put things into perspective, you could have a small office with very few alterations needed, and this could take just 6 weeks. On the other hand, you could be transforming an old building into an office space, which requires items like new floors, ceilings, HVAC, and internal structural elements, which could add up to 4-6 weeks to the project timeline.



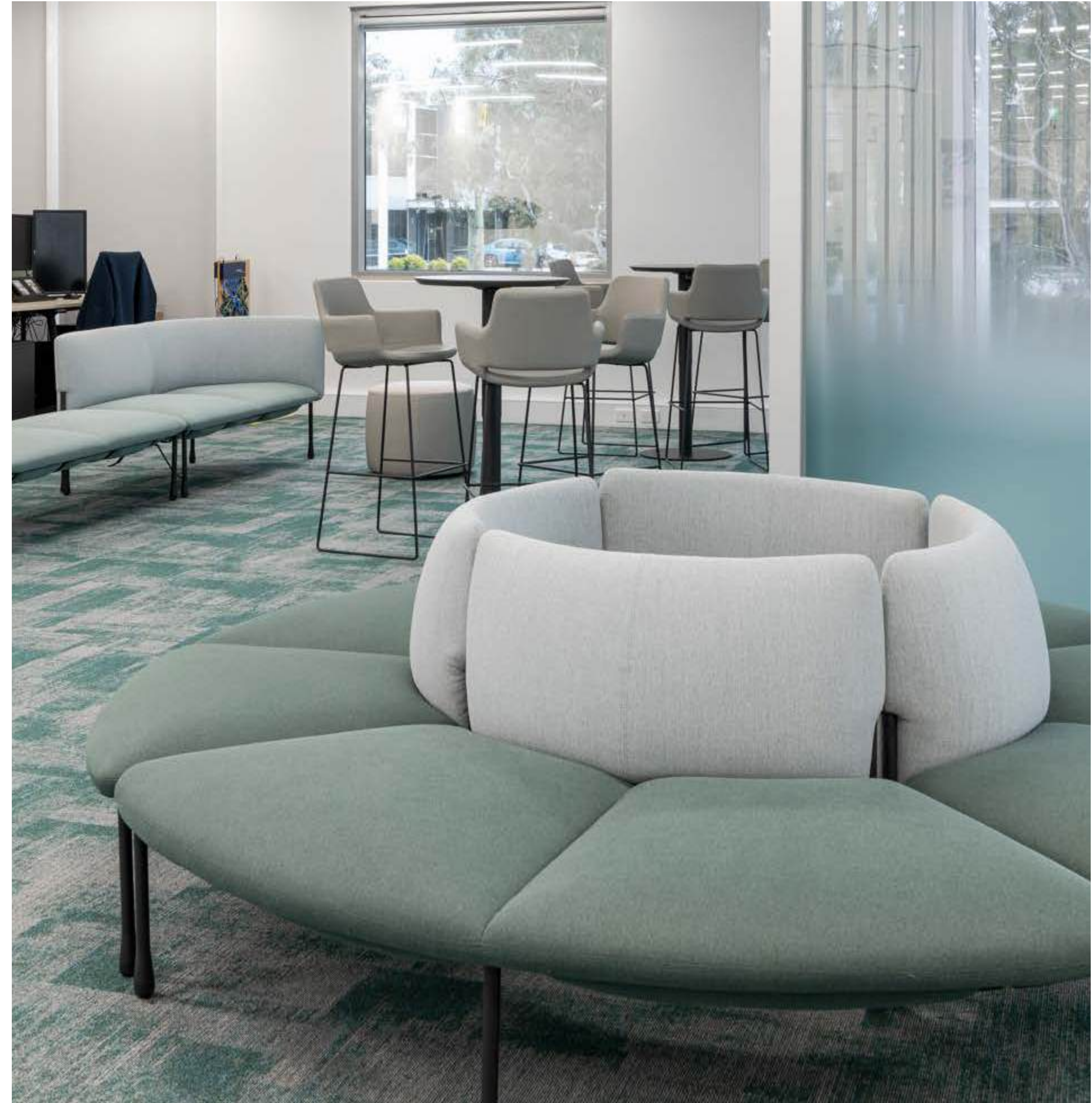
# Permits and Approvals

When fitting out any commercial space, obtaining permits and approvals is unavoidable. Applications to regulatory bodies (such as town planning, health & safety, Heritage Victoria or landlords) need time to be processed and approved.

On average, it takes around 3 weeks to prepare and finalise a complete set of construction drawings, 2 weeks to obtain a building permit and up to 2 weeks for landlord approval. In cases where it is a new build or you are looking to do a change of use on a building, this can take up to 12 weeks for approvals.

## Approximate approval timeframes:

- Construction drawings: 3 weeks
- Building permit: 2 weeks
- Landlord approval: 2 weeks
- Change-of-use or new build: up to 12 weeks

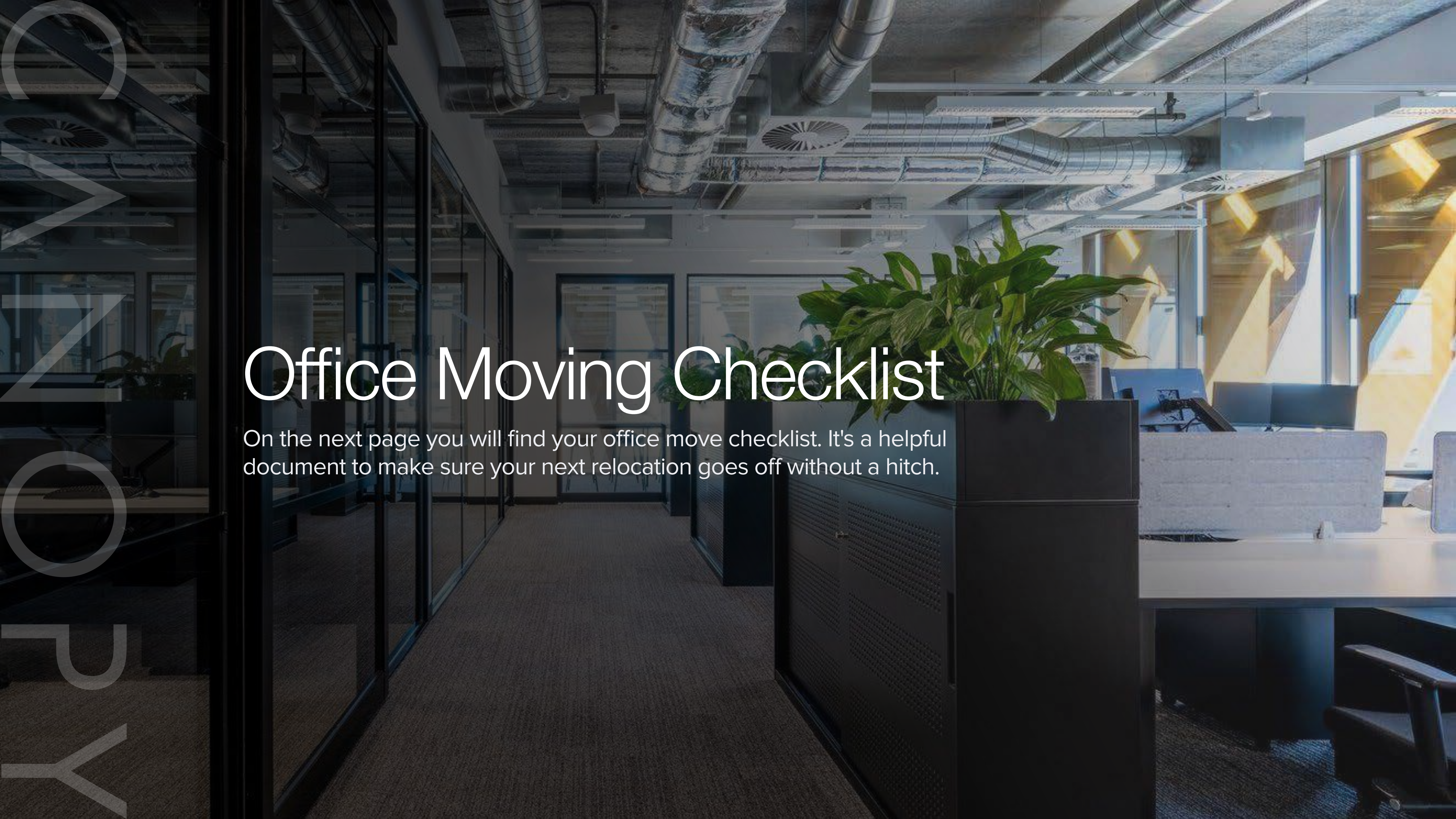


# Start Early to Avoid Delays

Utilise the property expertise of your fitout contractor and gain the foresight needed to identify any potential costs and delays before they arise. This means consulting them at the time of searching for your prospective premise, which is usually around a year before your lease may end.

This will be one of the most expensive capital investments your business will undertake for some time. Start early, take the time to find the right space for your team. Also, involve your staff at various stages of the process to review and assess your shortlisted space against the needs and requirements of everyone who will be working in the space.





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# Office Moving Checklist

On the next page you will find your office move checklist. It's a helpful document to make sure your next relocation goes off without a hitch.

## 7 - 12 Months Out

- Review your current commercial lease agreement. Understand what terms and conditions you need to abide by should you decide not to renew. Understand what penalties may apply if you decide to break your lease early.
- Identify the scope for the new office.
- If you haven't already, start researching and inspecting potential spaces for relocation.
- If not yourself, assign a project manager to oversee the move at every stage. Work with them to create a moving plan (using this checklist), to keep everything on track.
- Set a moving budget and share this with the project manager to avoid overspend.
- If you have a new space locked in, explore your office fitout options. A custom fitout can be designed and optimised for your unique business needs.

## 3 - 6 Months Out

- Sign the lease agreement on your new space.
- Notify your current landlord and give official notice in writing.
- Notify your wider team of the move and the potential relocation date.
- Decide what furniture and equipment you'll keep, and if there is a need to purchase new furniture.
- Lock in your moving date.
- Depending on the size of your team, assign department leaders to coordinate the move along with your project manager.
- Finalise your office fitout design, timeframe, and budget. Use this to determine when you should start your new fitout design.
- Secure a removalist company.
- Create an inventory checklist of all office supplies, equipment, and furniture.
- Looking Ahead: Review special equipment and determine how it will be handled during the move. If you have a "make good" clause in your current lease agreement, explore office strip out options to ensure you receive your bond back in full.

## 1 - 2 Months

- Begin your office fitout if you haven't started already.
- Start packing and tagging non-essential items and their final destinations (e.g. new office, offsite storage, recycling)
- Walk through your new space with your office fitout provider and assess the work in progress.
- If you're bringing older equipment into the new office, tag all essential items and confirm this with the removalist.
- Notify customers, clients, and suppliers of the change of address. Share a point of contact during the transitional period and the address of the new location.
- Schedule IT, phone, and other necessary utility installations in the new office, and cut-off dates in your current office.

## 1-2 Weeks

- Complete your office strip out.
- If possible, encourage employees to work from home or rent a temporary coworking space for your team.
- Pack and label important items.
- Recycle, donate, or resell any items that won't be going into the new office.
- Consider renting an offsite storage space so that your contractors (removalists, defitters, etc.) aren't interrupting each other.
- Make sure you have multiple access keys, codes, and security tags available for your team on moving day.

## Moving Day

- Supervise the move alongside the moving project manager. Direct the moving company towards what to load, and where it should be placed in the new office.
- Assign a point person to manage any business responsibilities, as you will be unavailable for most of the day.
- Have refreshments on hand and lunch catered for the team members who will be assisting with the move.
- Keep emergency numbers at hand for all parties involved on the day.
- After the final box is loaded, walk through your old office to ensure nothing has been left behind.

## After Your Move

- Unpack and set up furniture and equipment.
- Test internet speeds and phone systems.
- Update the company website email signatures with the new address.
- Ensure that any insurance from the previous location has been transferred to the new office.
- Distribute keys/security codes to the rest of the team.
- Complete a post-move evaluation with the project manager and identify if any changes need to be made to the new layout.
- Consider issuing a press release regarding the new move.
- Celebrate the move, thanking your team for their support and patience during the transitional period.

CANOPY

# Ready to Plan Your 2026 Fitout?

Canopy Fitouts is Melbourne's end-to-end fitout partner, from test fits and design to build, furniture and relocation support. We have decades of experience building award-winning fitouts in Melbourne and beyond, helping business owners create functional, scalable, and beautiful office spaces. Speak to our team today for guidance in building your next office fitout.

[Book a consultation](#) →