

Joint Organisations - Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a Joint Organisation?

A: A Joint Organisation is a new entity under the Local Government Act comprising member councils in regional NSW to provide a stronger voice for the communities they represent.

A Joint Organisation will provide a more structured, permanent way for local councils, State agencies and other interested groups to collaborate. Each region will decide its own priorities, working on short and long term projects such as attracting a new industry to the region or improving the health of a river system. By putting their resources together and focusing on the unique challenges and strengths of their whole region, Joint Organisation members can drive better outcomes for local residents.

Each Joint Organisation will comprise at least three member councils and align with one of the State's strategic growth planning regions. One of the member council's mayors will be elected chairperson and an Executive Officer may be appointed.

Q: How will Joint Organisations benefit councils and communities in regional NSW?

A: Joint Organisations will transform the way that the NSW Government and local councils collaborate, plan, set priorities and deliver important projects on a regional scale. These new partnerships will benefit local communities across regional NSW by working across traditional council boundaries.

Q: How do we know Joint Organisations will work?

A: The Joint Organisation model has been developed in close consultation with councils and the NSW Government has listened to regional councils to get the model right. This included a pilot program for five groups of councils to test a range of options, which involved the participation of 43 councils and delivered a range of initiatives and projects to those regions.

An independent evaluation of the pilot program found Joint Organisations bring benefits to regional communities in delivering on-the-ground projects and attracting more investment to regional communities.

Q: How are Joint Organisations different to Regional Organisations of Councils?

A: The Joint Organisation model provides for greater certainty and continuity as well as recognising the unique differences in the many regions of NSW. While some ROCs have been effective, they have varied functions, membership, and governance structures which often makes collaboration more difficult.

Q: Why has the Government decided to make Joint Organisations voluntary?

A: The majority of regional councils support Joint Organisations but some asked for more time and flexibility to determine their own membership of a new regional body. The Government has listened to this feedback.

Q: Why should councils choose to form a Joint Organisation?

A: Joint Organisations will provide a forum for councils, agencies and others to come together and focus on their regional priorities – the things that matter for that region. Joint Organisations will help drive the delivery of important regional projects – the infrastructure and services that local communities need and deserve.

Joint Organisations will also provide councils with a more efficient way to deliver shared services for members and the region. Where member councils agree, they can choose to share a common approach to services such as information technology, water management services and community strategic planning. The NSW Government will provide \$3.3 million to support councils to establish Joint Organisations.

Q: Can councils determine their own regional boundaries?

A: While membership of Joint Organisations is voluntary, the NSW Government will only support the creation of Joint Organisations within existing State planning regions and in regional NSW. Councils have told us that effective collaboration will only be realised when State and local government boundaries are aligned.

To aid this process the NSW Government has consulted the sector on boundary criteria which they can take into account when determining the membership of their Joint Organisation.

Joint Organisation boundaries should:

- align with, or ‘nest’ within one of the State’s strategic growth planning regions
- demonstrate a clear community of interest between member councils and regions
- not adversely impact on other councils or JOs, for example, leaving too few councils to form a JO
- be based around a strong regional centre or centres
- be of an appropriate size to partner with State, Commonwealth and other partners.

Consistent with previous Government decisions, Joint Organisations will not be considered for metropolitan Sydney and the Central Coast at this time.

Q: What funding is available to Joint Organisations?

A: The Government will provide up to \$3.3 million in seed funding to Joint Organisations to support their establishment. The Government will identify opportunities for additional investment through Joint Organisations in regional economies.

Funding for each Joint Organisation will be based on the number of councils that choose to form a Joint Organisations, with maximum funding provided to regions where all councils in a region choose to be members of the new regional body.

All Joint Organisations, whether they were pilot regions or not, will be provided with seed funding.

Further details on funding arrangements will be provided to councils.

Q: Will this funding be enough to help councils establish a JO?

A: The NSW Government is providing significant funding and support to help those councils that choose to establish a Joint Organisation. The pilot program demonstrated that groups of councils can achieve substantial benefits for their communities and significant cost savings by working together through a Joint Organisation.

Q: What are the next steps for interested councils?

A: Following the passage of legislation through Parliament, councils will be invited to nominate to form a Joint Organisation in their region. Councils are encouraged to open discussions with their neighbours as soon as possible.

The Office of Local Government is available to facilitate these discussions and provide support to councils through the nomination process. Specific requirements to form a Joint Organisation will be provided to councils shortly.

Each Joint Organisation will be created by a proclamation and the NSW Government will then ask the Commonwealth to endorse each Joint Organisation as a non-national system employer to ensure that any staff of a Joint Organisation, with the exception of the Executive Officer, are employed under the State local government award.

Q: What support will be provided to councils and Joint Organisations once established?

A: The Office of Local Government will work with Joint Organisations to support their establishment and ensure they have the necessary systems and governance in place for the Joint Organisations to deliver results for regional communities.

The Office of Local Government and the Department of Premier and Cabinet will foster collaboration between Joint Organisations and State agencies to identify and act on opportunities to benefit regional communities.

Q: Can councils choose not to participate?

A: Councils can choose not to become a member of a Joint Organisation. The Government strongly encourages all councils in regional NSW to consider the benefits and opportunities offered by Joint Organisations.

Councils that are members of Joint Organisations will be able to take advantage of investment opportunities that are delivered through the Joint Organisation.

Q: Is there a role for Parliamentary Secretaries in Joint Organisations?

A: Parliamentary Secretaries will play a key role in championing a new, shared regional collaboration which will bring together Regional Leadership Groups of State agencies and Joint Organisations.

Q: How has the Government's approach changed?

A: The Joint Organisation model that will be enabled through the proposed legislation is consistent with the consultation and engagement with the sector. The Government has been listening to councils and has decided to implement Joint Organisations in a more flexible way.