

IPAA NSW Young Professionals Network Policy Hack 2026

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Policy Hack?

Policy Hack is a unique opportunity for innovative and ambitious young professionals across the NSW public sector.

Participants will work in teams of 4-5 to develop a creative policy response to a real and current NSW Government challenge. Along the way, you'll build practical policy skills, collaborate with peers from different agencies and receive guidance from an experienced mentor.

At the end of the program, submissions will be assessed by a panel of senior public sector leaders, with finalist teams invited to present their ideas at the Closing Ceremony.

What are the benefits of participating?

By participating in the Policy Hack, you will:

- Work on real and current policy challenges facing NSW
- Collaborate with young professionals from across the public sector
- Develop practical policy analysis, writing and problem-solving skills
- Receive guidance and feedback from experienced policy professionals
- Showcase your ideas to senior leaders across government
- Expand your professional network across agencies

Finalist teams will also participate in an IPAA Presentation Masterclass on Monday 7 September 2026 to help prepare for the final pitch at the Closing Ceremony on Thursday 10 September 2026.

Do I need to have policy background to participate?

No! The Policy Hack is open to young professionals from all backgrounds, professions and levels of experience. You do not need previous policy experience to participate.

We encourage anyone who is interested in solving complex public sector challenges, learning new skills and working collaboratively across government to get involved.

What should I expect?

The Policy Hack will commence with an Opening Ceremony on **Thursday 13 August 2026**, where participants will hear from the sponsoring agencies and learn more about the policy challenges.

Before the Opening Ceremony, participants will be allocated to teams of 4-5 young professionals from across different NSW Government agencies.

Teams will then have approximately two weeks to develop and submit a policy response to their allocated challenge.

Submissions are due by midday (12:00 PM) on Monday 31 August 2026.

During the challenge period, participants will be supported through:

- **Policy Writing Course – Monday 17 August 2026**
Delivered by a policy expert, this session will provide practical guidance on developing and communicating effective policy solutions.
- **Policy Hack Working Session - Thursday 20 August 2026**
An in-person collaboration session where teams can work together, seek guidance and ask questions of the sponsoring agency.

Following submission, entries will be reviewed and assessed before being provided to the judging panel.

Finalist teams will be notified on **Friday 4 September 2026** and invited to present their ideas at the Closing Ceremony on **Thursday 10 September 2026**, where the winning team will be announced.

What are the 2026 Policy Hack topics?

This year, participants can nominate their preferred policy challenge during registration.

Artificial Intelligence, supported by Department of Customer Service:

- **Question 1 - Accountability:** How might NSW Government create an environment where Artificial Intelligence innovation can thrive while ensuring it remains safe, ethical and accountable?
- **Question 2 – Sustainable Innovation:** How might NSW ensure data centre development is environmentally responsible, visually appropriate and community-aligned, while also growing a local ecosystem of developers, startups and scaleups that creates skilled jobs and long-term economic opportunity?

Net Zero, supported by NSW Treasury:

- **Question 3 - Co-ordinated Delivery:** What approaches could NSW Government take to ensure Net Zero plans translate into coordinated, on-the-ground delivery across multiple sectors?
- **Question 4 - Community trust:** How else might NSW Government continue to build and maintain community trust and support for the infrastructure and changes required to deliver the Net Zero transition at pace and scale?

How much time do I need to commit?

We recommend discussing ways of working once teams are allocated to confirm how and when you will develop your submission.

Previous hack teams have either dedicated a couple of hours each day or spent a full day over the weekend to finalise their submission. You will also need to allow time to seek advice your mentor as well as attend the Policy Writing course and Policy Hack Working Session.

If your team is selected as a finalist, you will need allocate time to finalise your response and prepare a presentation for the closing ceremony on Thursday 10 September 2026.

What needs to be included in my group's submission?

Teams must submit **one** of the following:

1. A presentation of up to **6 slides** (maximum), or

2. A written summary of up to **2 pages (1,500 words maximum)**.

We recommend including the following sections in your submission:

- Team introduction
- Executive summary
- Background and context
- Problem statement
- Proposed solution
- Risk assessment
- Conclusion

These sections are intended as guidance only. Teams may choose an alternative structure, provided their submission clearly outlines the problem, proposed solution and supporting rationale within the submission limits.

Appendices (optional):

Teams may include appendices to provide supporting research, analysis, or evidence of policy development. Please note that appendices will not be considered during the judging process.

Submission Tips

- Be creative in how you present your proposal.
- Keep your submission concise and focused.
- Consider the primary audience: a judging panel comprising senior leaders from across the sector.
- Aim to communicate your proposal clearly enough to be understood within five minutes.
- Use professional language, presentation, and formatting throughout.

A marking rubric will be provided to all teams after the opening ceremony to support the development of submissions.

How do we submit our submissions?

To submit, please nominate one representative from your team to email your group's submission to events@nsw.ipaa.org.au by **12:00 pm (midday) on Monday, 31 August 2026**.

Is there a criteria used to judge the submissions?

Yes. All submissions will be assessed against a judging framework endorsed by the judging panel.

Further information about the judging criteria will be provided during the Opening Ceremony and shared with participants afterwards.

What are the key dates?

Event	Date	Location
Opening Ceremony	Thursday, 13 August 2026, 5:00 – 6:30 PM	Online
Policy Writing Course	Monday, 17 August 2026	Online
Working Session	Thursday, 20 August 2026	Face to face
Submissions Due	Monday, 31 August 2026 by Midday (12:00 PM)	Via email
Finalists Announced	Friday, 4 September 2026	Via email

Presentation Masterclass*	Monday, 7 September 2026	Online
Closing Ceremony	Thursday, 10 September 2026	Face to face

Further details, including locations and times, will be provided closer to each event. **Please note** the Presentation Masterclass will only be available to the Policy Hack Finalist Teams.

I'm based in the regions, can I still participate?

Absolutely.

Most team collaboration occurs online, making the Policy Hack accessible regardless of location.

The Opening Ceremony will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams, and virtual participation options will also be available for regional participants attending the Closing Ceremony.

How are the teams formed?

Teams are formed based on your preferred policy question. To encourage collaboration across the sector and diverse skillsets within teams, your department and position title is also considered.

Will I be able to select who is in my policy hack group?

No. Teams are intentionally formed to encourage participants to collaborate with people outside their existing networks and bring together a diverse mix of experiences and perspectives.

What type of assistance or support is available?

Participants will be supported through:

- A Policy Writing Course delivered by a policy expert
- An in-person Working Session with opportunities to engage directly with sponsoring agencies
- Guidance from a mentor
- Resources and information provided throughout the challenge

How do I find a mentor?

Once your team has been formed, you are encouraged to identify a mentor who can provide advice and guidance throughout the challenge.

Your mentor could be:

- An experienced policy practitioner
- A subject matter expert relevant to your challenge
- A leader with policy development or implementation experience

If your team is unable to identify a suitable mentor, please contact the organising committee and we will assist where possible.

How much help can I request from my mentor?

Your mentor's main role is to be a sounding board and help provide guidance in case your team gets stuck during the development of your submission. Your mentor cannot help you write your submission. Once you have confirmed a mentor for your team, we recommend having conversation with them and setting aside some time in advance on when you would like to meet with them. We encourage you limit your request to no longer than 1 hour a week of your mentor's time.