

MULTIFAMILY EXECUTIVE

How to Create a Productive Coworking Space

Multifamily pros share their best practices and tips on creating a successful coworking amenity.

By **Leah Draffen**



Interiors by Mary Cook Associates / Developed by Toll Brothers Apartment Living

Residents at Notion in Decatur, Georgia, enjoy an elegant mailroom with a work-from-home area and a built-in coffee station.

Now at the five-year anniversary of the COVID lockdowns, work still looks much different for many employees. Despite some return-to-office notices, remote work and hybrid schedules continue to dominate, and multifamily properties have had to accommodate this new way of life for many residents.

The business centers of pre-pandemic times don't quite fill the need as work-from-home employees now require more than a conference room or makeshift common lounge area. These residents looking to work outside their apartments but still on premises want flexible spaces for both quiet, private meetings and for email-reading tasks that allow for conversation with others.

What was once a nice-to-have amenity is now a necessity for multifamily communities, according to Baron Property Group chief operating officer and principal Andrew Till. The company has seen a consistent demand for well-designed coworking environments.

“Initially, coworking spaces were simple lounge areas with a few desks, often doubling as a media room or even a library,” says Till. “Now, they’ve evolved into dedicated, fully functioning work hubs that are within a quiet zone to accommodate hybrid meetings, better sound acoustics, and more comfortable seating arrangements.”

To plan an efficient coworking space, Alison Mills, vice president of design and development at CRG, says, “The essentials come down to flexibility, connectivity, and comfort.” These essentials are best utilized when the location of the coworking area is a mix of high visibility without chaotic noise.

Location, Location, Location

Deciding on where to place coworking areas deems mixed responses among industry professionals. “The higher the foot traffic and the more centralized the coworking space is to other amenities, the better. People use these spaces so they can feel connected, so placing them at the end of hallways or in low-traffic areas does not work as well,” says Kevin Cooky, assistant vice president, regional property manager, and revenue manager at Draper and Kramer.

In contrast, Till says that spaces more separated from high-traffic amenity spaces are better received by Baron Property Group’s residents. On the same note, Mario Gaztambide, senior managing director of residential properties at LeFrak, says, “We’ve discovered that designing coworking spaces in areas with abundant natural light and away from other busy amenity zones is generally preferred by residents.”

However, the question of high-traffic areas or more secluded, destinations can find a middle ground, according to CRG’s Mills. She says, “Proximity to high-traffic areas can help drive engagement, but it’s a delicate balance. If a coworking space is too close to social amenities, it can become too noisy. Ideally, these spaces should be near main thoroughfares but still separated enough to maintain a quiet atmosphere.

“In student housing, we’ve found that having coworking spaces near lobbies and dining areas encourages casual use, while dedicated study areas tucked deeper into a building cater to more serious work,” Mills adds.



CRG & Lamar Johnson Collaborative

Chapter Madison at the University of Wisconsin-Madison provides a variety of settings for students to study, meet, and collaborate.

Preferred Elements

Regardless of which location a developer or owner chooses, all agree that natural light is a must, as Gaztambide mentions.

At Bisby, LeFrak's latest rental development in Jersey City, New Jersey, the community features dedicated private workspaces of varying sizes and a two-level coworking center. "Its two-story windows allow for plenty of natural light so that the space blends functionality and inspiration," says Gaztambide.

Both Till and Mills concur that natural light is a preferred element for residents. Mills says, "Access to natural light and outdoor views enhances the appeal—no one wants to work in a windowless box."

"Residents most appreciate quality, high-functioning basics with thoughtful design. Designating an area for a coworking space, like we've done at Metro Parc North [in Hialeah, Florida], tends to yield more usage than a mere lounge repurposed for remote work. Comfortable and ample seating, natural light, or a connection to the outdoors is also highly valued," Till says.

From a design perspective, Mary Cook, president and founder of Mary Cook Associates, shares, "If you want coworking amenities to be a destination for residents, then you need to make them appealing. Spaces must be aesthetically beautiful with ample natural light and have elevated finishes and furnishings, great lighting, comfortable temperature, and a variety of seating options with proper ergonomics. If it feels like a back-of-house space, it likely won't get as much use."

When considering the evolution of coworking spaces in recent years, Marilyn Russell, director of corporate and landlord services for Baker Barrios Architects, says, "There is a very big focus on wellness and biophilic design—responding with natural lighting, outdoor seating, terrace options, acoustic solutions, and plants."

She continues, "A location with a view and natural lighting, especially when paired with outdoor terraces and green spaces, creates a unique work-from-home experience, which is especially important in luxury developments."

To Meet or Chat

Offering a mix of private nooks, soundproof spaces, and zones to spread out among others is beneficial for residents who hail from many different industries.

Cooky says, "Most work-from-home positions still require virtual meeting participation, which calls for a degree of privacy. We also find residents tend to be less comfortable in coworking spaces the more populated they become, so it's important to ensure these amenities have plenty of space so people can have a level of separation. Likewise, there should be a good variety of seating, including a mix of open areas as well as private nooks for taking a call or a meeting."

At Draper and Kramer, Cooky says features like glass-enclosed offices tend to work well and are very popular for residents who need to work quietly without feeling shut off from others.

Considering which areas work best, or are preferred, Baron Property Group's Till says it largely depends on the time of day and the type of work residents are doing. "Private rooms or booths tend to be in higher demand for video calls or more focused work, while communal areas with larger tables tend to be more active during the afternoons for casual meetings and collaborative partnerships."

Mills shares a similar sentiment, “Communal spaces see more consistent traffic, particularly in student housing, because they’re designed for casual collaboration and social studying. That said, demand for private rooms has surged, especially post-pandemic, as people appreciate having a dedicated, distraction-free space for calls, deep work, or test prep. Having enough one- to two-person rooms is key as they tend to fill up quickly and can be used for a full day but so is having a good mix—residents want the ability to shift between social and focused settings depending on their workload.”



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In Medway, Massachusetts, Hathon offers a private conference room and a coworking lounge, among other amenities.

Top Tech and Reservations

The coveted private hubs are best utilized and appreciated by residents when they are reservable, says Gaztambide. For LeFrak, coworking spaces at Miami’s SoLé Mia and Bisby are equipped with the latest in technology plus private and reservable rooms.

Till adds that Baron Property Group’s Metro Parc North’s coworking spaces are equipped with top-of-the-line tech that allows for reservable rooms. Reservable rooms are only one prong of the tech security and safety features preferred by both property managers and residents alike.

Russell adds, “Technology is the word for coworking spaces. High-speed connectivity is the No. 1 priority. Mobile app-based smart access, smart booking that shows availability, and automated lighting and climate control are key tech features. Setups that include augmented reality and virtual reality capabilities for remote collaboration are a differentiator, too.

“Tech plays a role in terms of security, too, with 24/7 monitoring and automated visitor check-in. However, it’s vital it is all user-friendly,” she notes.

In addition to high-speed, reliable internet, coworking spaces work most efficiently with ample outlets and USB charging stations; interactive screens for brainstorming; printing stations; and virtual meeting setups.

“Owning a printer is a hassle, but access to one is a necessity. Whether it’s a lease agreement, a boarding pass, or tax documents, residents rely on printing more than they realize—until they need it,” says Jonathan Treble, founder and CEO of WithMe. “The most successful coworking spaces integrate self-serve, wireless printing solutions that eliminate IT headaches and free up staff time. With secure, on-demand access, residents get what they need instantly without the frustration of outdated office equipment.”

Sweetening the Space

Outside of tech capabilities, coworking spaces thrive when there is ergonomic seating and strong acoustics, plus coffee. “A great coworking space thrives on two essentials—Wi-Fi and caffeine. Coffee isn’t just a perk; it’s a daily ritual that fuels productivity and keeps residents engaged,” says Treble.

“The best multifamily communities are replacing outdated drip machines with premium, self-serve coffee stations that deliver a barista-quality experience. Convenience is key—when coffee is easily accessible in the coworking space, residents stay longer, collaborate more, and build stronger connections.”

And coffee is something everyone can agree on. Mills says, “Having an in-house coffee station or café-style setup makes a huge difference in how often people use these spaces.”

“Residents appreciate food and beverage offerings such as free coffee, and, as designers, we sometimes look to local coffeehouses or other ‘third places’ in the surrounding neighborhood for inspiration,” Cook adds.

“For example, at Notion, a 290-unit community in Decatur, Georgia, developed by Toll Brothers Apartment Living, we incorporated several multifunctional amenity spaces with beverage service in mind, including a mailroom that doubles as an additional work-from-home space, complete with a built-in coffee and cold beverage station.”

No matter the elements and space available to craft this popular amenity, coworking spaces are sure to continue evolving as residents’ needs change. With a cup of joe in hand—and possibly comfy sweats donned—residents can take advantage of high-tech, comfortable, and flexible workspaces just steps from their apartment doors.

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