



Australian Government



Workplace
Gender Equality
Agency

Workplace Gender Equality Action Planning Playbook

A playbook for planning effective actions for gender equality

October 2024



Taking effective action: About this playbook

The Action Planning Playbook provides guidance for employers seeking to develop and implement effective workplace gender equality action plans.

While sometimes daunting, action plans are a critical step to narrow the gender pay gap and cultivate a gender equal experience in your workplace.

The Playbook focuses attention on actions that may address issues emerging from your workplace data and provides a framework to make evidence-informed decisions on the actions to prioritise.

Section one: Preparing to succeed provides general information on action planning and useful tips and thinking tools for building your action plan.

Section two: Finding what works sets out relevant, evidence-informed actions that will enable progress against each of the gender equality indicators. These are also reflected in the playbook.

Section three: Understanding actions provides further information on each action. This section outlines why and how each action works, what you could implementing this action, and useful practitioner insights to inform the interventions that you will include in your final action plan.

No one understands your organisation better than the people who work there, so we consider this Playbook to be a compass, not a roadmap, for employers.

Taking this data-informed approach to action planning will lead to progress on gender equality, improving the experiences and outcomes for your workforce and, importantly, will improve your gender pay gap over time.

TIP: Boost your planning prowess

All planning begins with data. Before you craft your action plan, we recommend that you review your WGEA data to identify areas of disparity in your organisation that require focus and attention. Keep these in mind as you work through the playbook.

You can use this Playbook as a standalone resource or in conjunction with the guides and resources available on the WGEA website. We suggest that you do use the **WGEA Action Planning Tool** in conjunction with this Playbook. After inputting key metrics from your WGEA reporting data, the Action Planning Tool will generate a list of evidence-informed actions to consider when building a gender equality action plan.

What next? Following up on your action plan



Once you have built your final action plan, WGEA's masterclasses and advisory services can help you learn how to put those plans in place.



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SECTION 1

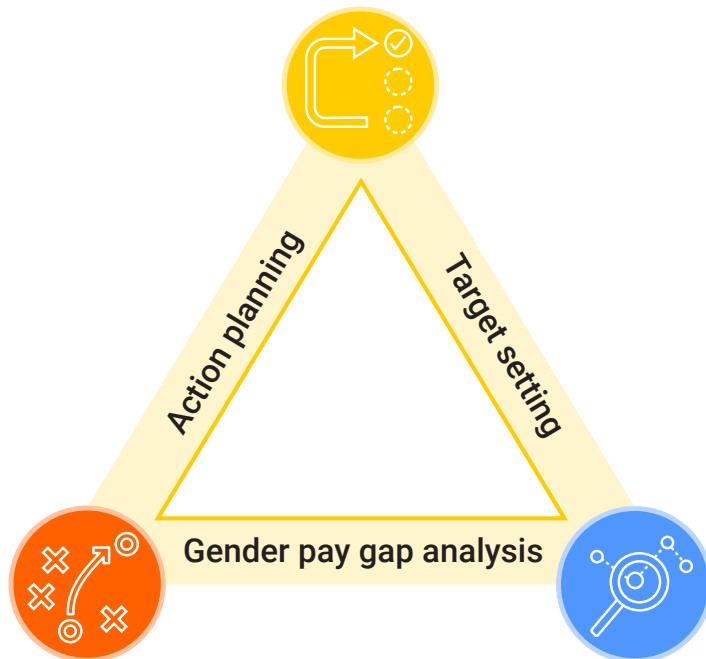
Preparing to succeed



Preparing to Succeed

Workplace gender equality is complex. Despite years of sustained effort, many employers can continue to struggle to create the gender equal employee experiences and outcomes they aspire to deliver. This Action Planning Playbook offers a framework for action to improve the quality and reach of workplace gender equality action planning. It draws on contemporary, evidence-informed interventions that align with the gender equality indicators employers report on to WGEA each year.

The most effective gender equality action plans are ‘fit for purpose’ and sustain progress over time.



Our evidence suggests that gender equality is more likely to be realised when gender equality action plans attend to the drivers of gendered disadvantage that are specific to the workplace, and interventions are aligned and embedded in the context and existing activities of the enterprise. This is because no two workplaces are the same and, by extension, require actions that emerge from a targeted data analysis and bespoke set of actions and targets.

Three key actions are fundamental to success:

- undertaking a gender pay gap analysis
- selecting relevant evidence-informed actions
- setting targets to track progress.

This Playbook sets out a blueprint for action that integrates these three key pillars of success – guiding your organisation to do what works in a way that works.

Need help undertaking your gender pay gap analysis?

WGEA offers [online masterclasses](#) and live learning events that help build organisational capabilities to narrow your gender pay gap. Register to attend a class on the WGEA website.



Gender Pay Gap analysis

Need help understanding your gender pay gap analysis? WGEA offers online masterclasses and live learning events that help build organisational capabilities to narrow your gender pay gap. Register to attend a class on the WGEA website.

The actions described in this Playbook extend from WGEA's Gender Pay Gap Analysis Guide.

The Gender Pay Gap Analysis Guide presents employers with a step-by-step guide to completing a gender pay gap analysis. It is the first step to taking effective action on workplace gender equality, and essential for reducing your gender pay gap.

A gender pay gap analysis is critical because it:

- will reveal the key drivers of your gender pay gap, including the levers that are already adding value to your results
- can help prioritise intervention by directing attention to where gendered impacts are showing up most intensely in your workplace
- will enable you to make some reasonable predictions as to how your gender equality outcomes are likely to improve over time.

In short, the analysis will enable employers to gain support for their program of work and articulate the material difference the effort will make in building a more gender equal enterprise.

Did you know?

Employers who undertook a gender pay gap analysis more than doubled progress on their pay gaps compared to those who did not.

From analysis to action

Along with analysis, making progress on gender equality relies on implementing the right suite of interventions. Achieving this is more complex than adopting a 'best practice' approach. Often, there may be more than one intervention that could lead to positive results and effectiveness, because your outcomes are highly dependent on context.

In some cases, selecting the appropriate intervention requires you to adapt the action to meet your specific workplace needs or end-user purpose.

Understanding **what actions can work, why they work, and how they might work** across different contexts enables you to choose the approach that best fits your workplace. These elements are the very essence of design thinking, and Sections 2 and 3 have these principles embedded in their design.

The tables in **Section 2** outline actions that align with data points from your gender pay gap analysis.

Once a list of potential actions is developed, you can apply the framework below to select and prioritise your actions. This is detailed in **Section 3**.



Tracking your success

Measuring impact and tracking progress is another factor instrumental to the success of your gender equality action planning. This where setting targets can greatly assist. Targets do much more than formalise and measure progress against goals. than formalise and measure progress against goals. Targets can bring a level of objectivity and transparency to action planning.

Further guidance for setting effective targets against your action plan can also be found in Appendix 1.

Developing your plan

STEP ONE



Conduct a gender pay gap analysis

Use your workplace data to identify key drivers of your gender pay gap and uncover 'red flags', i.e. gendered experiences within your organisation. This provides a baseline understanding of which aspects of your organisation should be prioritised in your gender equality action planning. It also indicates which actions in this guide should be considered.

STEP TWO



Use the Action Planning Tool (or tables in section 2) to generate a list of suitable actions

WGEA's [Action Planning Tool](#) allows you to enter your organisation's gender equality information related to the six gender equality indicators (explained in detail in Section 2) and curate a list of actions targeting each of the hotspots identified in this data. The Tool's actions are aligned to those in this Playbook, allowing you to refer to the latter for a further explanation of each identified action.

STEP THREE



Select the most relevant and feasible actions

Section 2 outlines the criteria for considering each action. With the insights found in steps 1 and 2 above, you can formulate an achievable list of actions that could address the key issues reflected in your data points.

STEP FOUR



Select and prioritise the actions to draw on

Understanding each of the potential actions and how they work in context, the outcomes they achieve and considerations for future implementation will help you establish a plan likely to have the most effective impact in your workplace.



SECTION 2

Finding what works



In this section, you will find several tables designed to help you create a list of actions, as you start to build your gender equality action plan.

How to use these tables

As you begin developing your gender equality action plan, keep in mind there are 6 main areas to consider. These reflect the WGEA gender equality indicators (GEIs). The GEIs are used to measure the status of workplace gender inequality and can help organisations to identify areas for action.



Each of the 6 GEIs are listed and fully explained on WGEA's website.

Additionally, the areas of influence in this playbook also link to WGEA's Gender Pay Gap Analysis framework, which encourages organisations to monitor and analyse data covering their:

- workforce gender composition
- pay distribution
- workforce mobility
- talent pools
- patterns of engagement.

The top of each table highlights the main data outcome to consider from your analysis.

The far left-hand column shows the second level indicator you should consider as part of your selection process.

Find the indicator/s that apply and then read the Action and the Rationale for the action. If this applies, then read the further information on the action in Section 3. This gives a deeper understanding of how and why the action works in practice, and what you can expect to see over time as part of your implementation plan.

If you wish to consider this as part of your plan, add it to your master list of potential actions. You can then reduce and prioritise your final list using the guidance **here**.

The Action Planning Tool developed by WGEA can assist you in determining which of the actions from the tables are most suitable for your organisation.

Input your organisation's gender equality data – which can all be found on the Data Explorer if you are a reporting organisation – and the tool will identify areas of concern and produce a list of actions that can be applied to address them.

This list of actions should also be reduced and prioritised at your discretion.



Workforce gender composition

Workforce gender composition measures the participation rates of different genders in a workplace. This includes the proportion of different genders by role, in different salary brackets, in management and non-management. It also includes the rates of full-time, part-time and casual work, and the rates of resignations, promotions and appointments by gender. Workforce composition is often called a 'moment in time' metric as the number of employees will shift as a workplace attracts, retains and promotes employees. For this reason, employers will collect data on workforce composition based on a selected 'snapshot' date. Comparing this data over time allows employers to assess the outcomes of their actions to attract and retain employees.

If your turnover or 'attraction and selection' metrics are gendered (for example, in job applications, selection outcomes or attrition) finding out why will help you to identify and build actions to address those issues.

In addition to your gender pay gap analysis metrics, asking existing staff why they applied/joined and what anchors them to stay, and comparing that feedback across genders, can be a powerful compass for employers in selecting and prioritising actions that will make your action plan more effective.

If you find gendered composition of less than 40% men or women in a target role, team, or level

If the underrepresented gender makes up <40% of your composition, this is not gender balanced.

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Your candidate pools are not yet gender balanced for your targeted role, team or level <input type="checkbox"/> You are attempting to bring new or emerging pipelines of talent to a role, team or level <input type="checkbox"/> There are low levels of interest from women for manager or leadership roles within a particular level, team or role <input type="checkbox"/> An underrepresented gender makes up <40% of a certain job, family or occupation group, or a graduate cohort	Use job redesign to deepen your recruitment candidate pool	<p>Applying a gender lens to the design of the job is an effective way to enhance attraction and deepen your candidate pool.</p> <p>By modifying the design of a job, you can attract a new cohort of potential candidates who may not have previously considered a job and/or remove factors that may deter a target gender.</p> <p>Understanding the gendered impacts of different job structures allows organisations to redesign jobs to build their talent pool and address gender composition imbalances.</p>	25



If you find gendered composition of less than 40% men or women in a target role, team, or level

If the underrepresented gender makes up <40% of your composition, this is not gender balanced.

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Low levels of interest from the underrepresented gender in senior/manager positions internally	Use talent and succession planning frameworks to improve your workforce gender composition	<p>Succession planning is the process used to identify critical positions within the organisation and develop long-term plans to fill those positions with high performing/high potential talent from inside the organisation.</p> <p>By applying a gender lens to talent and succession planning, you can enhance retention, promotion and engagement of a target cohort to progress gender composition targets.</p> <p>This works particularly well for strategic leadership positions where there are known barriers to the appointment of women.</p>	27
<input type="checkbox"/> You find gendered differences in performance outcomes	Undertake a gender impact assessment (GIA) of your performance evaluation processes	<p>Gender can influence the experience and outcomes of employees in performance evaluations, progress and promotion processes.</p> <p>Differences between genders emerge in areas such as rates and levels of promotions, development opportunities, rewards and recognition, as well as individual performance ratings.</p> <p>Evidence suggests the gender of the employee and the manager plays a role, and that this can be offset by minimising the opportunity for subjectivity to creep into these processes.</p> <p>A gender impact assessment will identify potential sources of bias and structural disadvantage to offset these potential impacts.</p>	29



If you find gendered composition of less than 40% men or women in a target role, team, or level

If the underrepresented gender makes up <40% of your composition, this is not gender balanced.

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> You find a gendered disparity in the rates at which candidates progress through various stages of your recruitment process	Embed a skills-based assessment process into your recruitment program	<p>A skills-based recruitment process focuses on the skills of the candidates in relation to the role requirements and, by extension, can give your recruitment process an additional layer of objectivity.</p> <p>This acts as a counter point to any unintended subjectivity, including gender bias and gendered influences, on selection.</p> <p>When combined with structured interviews, the objectivity of a skills-based assessment can minimise bias and increase the job-to-person fit that is crucial to secure a successful hire.</p>	31
<input type="checkbox"/> Your organisation has a consistent imbalance between genders in rates of both recruitment and promotion, particularly relative to comparable organisations	Undertake a gender impact assessment of your recruitment and promotion policies	<p>Policies, programs and services can impact men and women in different ways and may be the result of hidden biases and unintended consequences.</p> <p>Left unexamined, these can lead to gendered outcomes in the workplace with disadvantage that can accumulate over time.</p> <p>Undertaking a gender impact assessment of your recruitment and promotion policies can prevent this from occurring – strengthening the overall benefits and effectiveness of your policies and enhancing their positive impact and guidance.</p>	33



If you find gendered composition of less than 40% men or women in a target role, team, or level

If the underrepresented gender makes up <40% of your composition, this is not gender balanced.

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Applications for your job postings are heavily skewed towards a particular gender	Embed a gender informed approach into job advertising	<p>A gender informed approach to advertising recognises that better gender equality outcomes can be achieved when the needs and perspectives of all genders are considered from the very start of the employment relationship, including attraction.</p> <p>There is strong evidence that language used in job ads can encourage or deter certain applicants from applying. This has impacts on gender composition and occupational segregation.</p> <p>Adopting a gender informed approach to job advertising can markedly improve the depth and breadth of your candidate pools by sparking interest and encouraging target cohorts to inquire and apply.</p>	36
<input type="checkbox"/> Succession into senior leadership roles is gendered <input type="checkbox"/> The talent pool ready for the next level up is gendered <input type="checkbox"/> Gendered patterns of attrition are present for underrepresented group <input type="checkbox"/> Gendered employee engagement scores on development and performance measure (e.g. access to training, development, promotion or progress)	Use sponsorship and mentorship to improve your workforce gender composition	<p>Mentorship is a formal or informal relationship between a more-experienced mentor and a less-experienced employee.</p> <p>Sponsorship involves proactive and instrumental action taken by the sponsor to advance a person's career.</p> <p>Research shows both interventions can enhance gender equality outcomes, with sponsorship showing a more material and positive outcome for career progression.</p> <p>Applying a gender lens to the programs before implementation can increase their impact and effectiveness by removing unintentional bias or latent gendered outcomes.</p>	38



If you find gendered composition of less than 40% men or women in a target role, team, or level

If the underrepresented gender makes up <40% of your composition, this is not gender balanced.

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> You find that employees with caring responsibilities are leaving the organisation or showing signs of dissatisfaction at higher rates	Improve facilities and supports available for employees with caring responsibilities	<p>When employers provide facilities and supports for employees to balance work with caring responsibilities it can remove significant barriers to workforce participation for women and men.</p> <p>It also acknowledges and legitimises that work and family can and should be harmonised.</p> <p>When developed as facilities for all parents, including fathers, the organisation directly subverts ideal worker/carer norms and actively supports and acknowledges earning and caring as a legitimate, expected and integrated aspect of the employee lifecycle.</p>	41
<input type="checkbox"/> You find gendered patterns of attrition at senior levels in a level, team or role <input type="checkbox"/> <40% of your composition of part-time or casual employees consists of an underrepresented gender	Increase part-time and job-share work options for all staff	<p>Working full time is still considered the norm in most workplaces.</p> <p>Evidence suggests that women, and increasingly men, are interested in altering their hours to accommodate needs and responsibilities outside of work.</p> <p>At present, these needs are likely to differ across genders and at different stages of the employee lifecycle. They may extend beyond caregiving to include service, study and transition into retirement.</p> <p>Creating genuine opportunities for undertaking meaningful work in patterns of hours other than 'full time' can be a strong advantage in attracting and retaining talent and a powerful tool to addressing issues relating to gender segregation workforce composition.</p>	43



Boards and Governing Bodies

The composition of your governing body is as critical to gender equality as that of your workforce. All the benefits of gender diversity in your workforce, team or unit also apply to the outcomes and governance decisions of your executive, Board or other decision-making authority.

If you find less than 40% of any gender represented on your Board or Governing Body

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> You are unsure of what actions can improve your Board or Governing Body composition	Undertake a gender impact assessment (GIA) of Board or governing body recruitment and performance	<p>Expanding the talent pool to build a more gender balanced Board or Governing Body can be accomplished by undertaking a gender impact assessment of recruitment, position descriptions, skills and capabilities relating to recruitment and appointments.</p> <p>This process has the potential to uncover hidden and explicit barriers to women being appointed to these positions and, in some cases, those that prevent them from applying in the first place. Testing assumptions that relate to the critical skills and knowledge required for each role is essential for this action to work effectively.</p> <p>The process can also serve as a foundational step in setting quality gender composition targets for your board or governing body.</p>	45



If you find less than 40% of any gender represented on your Board or Governing Body

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Board or governing body appointments are dependent on internal succession and/or tenure (e.g. Command and Control)	Identify and establish alternative ways to encourage diverse decision making for governing bodies	<p>It is not always feasible to address the gender balance of boards and decision-making bodies in the short to medium term.</p> <p>This is a common issue for governing bodies where members have been recently appointed with time yet to serve, or where appointments are outside the organisation's control (e.g. governance via an international board, or time-on-position requirements).</p> <p>In such contexts, the benefits of a more gender diverse board or decision-making body can be achieved by the appointment of alternative groups such as an Advisory Committee, Consultative Council or similar.</p> <p>These alternatives can effectively emulate and provide the specialist advice, mitigation of risk and diverse thinking that emerges from gender balanced Boards without the delay and other obstacles that can serve as barriers to achievement.</p>	47



Equal Remuneration: The Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap measures the difference in the average or median pay of women and men within an occupation, job role or organisation as a whole. It is not to be confused with unequal pay, where employees of different genders are paid differently for the same work or different work of equal value. Unequal pay is illegal in Australia and has been since 1969. Although

instances of unequal pay still do contribute to the gender pay gap, there are many more causes that should be examined.

Gender pay gaps can reflect and reinforce gendered experiences within an organisation. Understanding the drivers of your workplace gender pay gap is the first step to ending it.

If you find a Gender Pay Gap greater than 5% in favour of any gender

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> You are unclear about what is driving your gender pay gap	Undertake a gender pay gap analysis	<p>A gender pay gap analysis will help you identify the drivers of the gender pay gaps in your workplace, as well as the range of experiences and outcomes within the workplace that may vary by gender and contribute to inequality.</p> <p>Key data points include workforce pay, gender composition, employee mobility, talent pool and patterns of engagement by gender.</p> <p>This action is critical to effective action planning; once you understand the drivers, you can take effective action to address them.</p> <p>The results of this analysis will inform your gender equality action plan. You should also use this information to check your organisation meets its legislative requirement for equal pay for work of equal or comparable value.</p>	49
<input type="checkbox"/> You have identified unequal pay (like-for-like pay gaps) in your analysis	Correct cases of unequal pay (like-for-like gaps)	<p>Unequal is where people are paid differently for performing the same work or work of equal or comparable value. This includes additional payments such as bonuses and superannuation. To discover instances of unequal pay within your organisation, you need to analyse your remuneration data and look for differences in pay by gender at an occupation and/or role level.</p> <p>Any instances of unequal pay should be corrected immediately as a legal requirement. This will usually occur by amending the salary of the lower paid employee to equal the higher rate of pay.</p>	51



If you find a Gender Pay Gap greater than 5% in favour of any gender

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> You are unclear about what actions to take to address your gender pay gap	Undertake a gender impact assessment (GIA) of your remuneration policy	<p>Policies, programs and services can impact each gender differently. This is known to contribute to the gender pay gap and can lead to gendered disadvantage which accumulates over time and across the employee lifecycle.</p> <p>A gender impact assessment of your policies, programs and services will highlight any areas where the outcomes and experiences differ between each gender. It will also serve to inform actions to address those differences and promote more gender equal outcomes in pay and beyond.</p>	53
<input type="checkbox"/> You require greater organisational commitment to reducing your gender pay gap	Embed gender pay gap metrics into manager performance frameworks	<p>The use of gender pay gap metrics as a key performance indicator for people leaders amplifies accountability for gender equality. It also reinforces the expectation that managers should identify and address gendered pay disparities as part of their management responsibility.</p> <p>This also ensures pay disparity remains on the radar of managers at other times of inequity risk, such as recruitment and performance assessment.</p>	56
<input type="checkbox"/> There is a notable pay discrepancy between roles requiring similar levels of capability, particularly between those that are male-concentrated and female-concentrated	Undertake a gender-inclusive job evaluation	<p>A gender-inclusive job evaluation compares roles and job capabilities to determine whether two or more roles are of equal or comparable value, and if they are being equitably remunerated.</p> <p>Applying a gendered lens to the analysis will highlight differences in the relative value of male-concentrated and female-concentrated roles at the same level and, by extension, can address issues of composition and occupational segregation and attrition.</p>	58



Flexible Work, Parental Leave, Support for Carers and Domestic Violence Support

Gendered differences in access and uptake of parental leave, flexible work and employee supports can signal that entrenched gender norms, or other barriers to equal employee experiences, are present within your organisation.

Uncovering the drivers or roadblocks to equal uptake can begin to direct your actions, as well as support your overall gender equality initiatives to reduce your gender pay gap.

If you find gendered differences in engagement with paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Low levels of part-time women in senior leadership roles <input type="checkbox"/> Men indicate a lack of support for caregiving and/or penalties in employee experience metrics <input type="checkbox"/> High rates of employees leaving the organisation after taking parental leave	Develop and deploy a universal, gender informed parental leave policy and return-to-work program	<p>In Australia, many organisations are moving towards gender-neutral parental leave policies, offering equal parental leave for all parents, irrespective of gender, and breaking down the old distinctions between 'primary' and 'secondary' carers.</p> <p>These distinctions are linked to the reinforcement of gendered norms and stereotypes relating to who 'should' take time away from work to care.</p> <p>A gender-neutral policy recognises the equally important role of both parents in caregiving, and de-genders the ideal work and carer norms that pervade the workplace.</p>	60
<input type="checkbox"/> Particularly low return-to-work rates for one gender <input type="checkbox"/> Low levels of applications and approvals at team or manager level for flexible work practices <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of support for caregiving noted in employee experience metrics <input type="checkbox"/> Return-to-work rates are low for second and subsequent births	Initiate manager training that includes applying a gender lens to caregiving and flexibility	<p>Applying a gender lens to caregiving and flexibility means to carefully and deliberately examine all the implications of gender associated with caregiving and flexibility – from policy to processes and related experiences across the employee lifecycle.</p> <p>Managers play a pivotal role in delivering a gender equal employment experience on behalf of the workplace. Gender-attuned 'people manager' training builds the capability of line managers at every level to deliver an inclusive and gender equal working environment. It also allows managers to become aware of gendered perceptions and barriers to flexible working, including their own biases.</p>	62

¹ When something is Gender Attuned it is attuned to differences in gendered experiences and focused on mitigating inequalities.



If you find gendered differences in engagement with paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Low levels of women in management or leadership roles <input type="checkbox"/> Men indicate a lack of support for caregiving and/or penalties in employee experience metrics	Implement an all-roles flex policy for all positions	<p>Flexible working allows more people at different stages of the employee lifecycle, and with a greater range of personal circumstances and characteristics, to work and progress through an organisation.</p> <p>Women are significantly more likely to engage in flexible working arrangements than men.</p> <p>The strong association between working full time and ideal work norms means working flexibly has become synonymous with women and with a gendered impact on pay, progression and access to development.</p> <p>Applying flexible working options to all roles will normalise flexible working for all employees. This can lead to more equal gender composition within occupations and roles, and support men to take on more caregiving responsibilities with less stigma and penalties.</p>	64
<input type="checkbox"/> Low return to work rates after long periods of leave (including parental leave) <input type="checkbox"/> Gendered or low approval or application rates in flexibility metrics	Embed flexibility metrics in leadership key performance indicators (KPIs)	<p>When flexible work metrics are embedded in leadership performance plans it reflects an employer's commitment to diversity. It sets the expectation that people leaders understand and are committed to workplace gender equality goals.</p> <p>This is particularly powerful as a leadership tool when KPIs are connected to gender relevant data points, (e.g. when performance data shows little or no change in the progress, pay and promotion of those on flexible work arrangements or where there is no gender balance in the uptake of flexible work arrangements).</p> <p>Monitoring flexibility measures as part of standard reporting to the governing body can help key decision makers to align their strategic decision making with organisational gender equality and diversity goals.</p>	67



If you find gendered differences in engagement with paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Low rates of parental leave uptake, especially among a particular gender	Embed an opt-out approach to parental leave for all parents	<p>An opt-out approach to parental leave for all parents assumes that any employee, who is eligible to take parental leave, will by default take their full entitlement to provide care for their child.</p> <p>If they do not want to take this entitlement (in either part or full) they will connect with their manager to opt out. This can prompt further discussion on options and supports for parental leave and care.</p> <p>This approach enhances participation as an earner/carer. It sends a strong signal of expectation and an active endorsement to fathers to take on a primary carer role for their children - breaking down the ideal worker/carer norms that often lock fathers out of pursuing care.</p>	69
<input type="checkbox"/> Superannuation is not being paid on paid and/or unpaid parental leave	Pay superannuation on paid and unpaid parental leave	<p>Evidence shows women are likely to retire with around a third of the superannuation of men.</p> <p>A major contributor is the higher proportion of women who take parental leave which has not been attached to superannuation, even when the parental leave is paid.</p> <p>An organisation that pays superannuation on parental leave demonstrates its commitment to gender equality and the financial security of all working parents.</p> <p>This can be a powerful attraction tool which can appeal to both women and men by legitimising the value of caregiving in the workplace and the intention to develop and maintain parents' attachment to the workplace.</p>	71



If you find gendered differences in engagement with paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Policies regarding domestic violence found to be inadequate	Implement processes to support effective referrals for employees experiencing or supporting victims of domestic violence	Family and domestic violence is a workplace issue. Every year, Australians from all demographics experience family and domestic violence, impacting their performance and productivity, mental health and wellbeing in addition to their safety at work.	73
<input type="checkbox"/> Opportunity identified to expand support for victim-survivors of domestic violence	Introduce paid domestic violence leave above what is offered under the national employment standards (NES)	<p>Access to paid leave for employees experiencing domestic or family violence is critical to supporting workplace gender equality through ensuring and supporting women's financial security over their life course.</p> <p>With one in 4 women over 15 reporting they have experienced violence from an intimate partner or family member, paid leave from work is likely to be both valued and needed in many workplaces.</p>	75



Employee consultation

By consulting with employees, you will be able to capture their lived experience, and the actions that you choose will be informed by both qualitative and quantitative data. This means your action plan will better reflect the needs of your employees. Employee consultation also demonstrates leadership commitment to gender equality.

If you find that the employee voice has not been captured

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> You are uncertain of the experiences or the key issues that are important to your employees	Establish an employee consultative committee (a diversity committee or an employee representative group/network) and consult with employees	<p>Consultative committees such as diversity committees or employee representative groups can inform and enable organisations to build diversity and inclusion into the culture of the workplace, identify employee issues and improve company culture while making employees feel supported.</p> <p>Drawing on employee experiences and insights in relation to gender equality can be a powerful way to shape and inform interventions, reality test ideas and innovations, and plan effective implementation.</p>	77



Sex-based harassment and discrimination

Sexual harassment and discrimination continue to be prevalent in the workplace despite legislative mechanisms aimed at prevention. In 2022, the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) found that one in three workers had experienced workplace sexual harassment in the last five years, and that even this figure was likely an underrepresentation as many incidents of harassment go unreported.

Identifying the risks and prevalence of sexual harassment in your workplace requires a clear understanding by everyone on what it is and how to prevent it.

Taking action to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination supports your positive duty to provide a safe and respectful workplace for all employees.

If it happens, organisational leaders, people managers, contact officers and HR professionals need to be equipped with the skills to respond.

If you find you do not have an organisational culture of prevention

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Policies are inconsistent with new legislation and have no inclusion of good practice examples that support prevention	Develop and implement a policy to prevent sex-based harassment, discrimination and bullying, with a clear grievance process and statement of intent	<p>Beyond providing a safe and respectful workplace for staff, employers are expected to take proactive measures to prevent workplace sexual harassment.</p> <p>A policy is more effective if it contains a clear statement about how the organisation intends to address and prevent sex-based harassment, discrimination and bullying, and how issues will be addressed. This provides a clear set of expectations for staff to follow in the event of an incident and subsequent report.</p>	79



If you find you do not have an organisational culture of prevention

Second level Indicators (more than one could apply)	Action	Rationale	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> Employees, particularly line managers, are not trained to respond in an appropriate and evidence-led way	Provide compulsory training to line managers about how to recognise and address workplace sex-based harassment	<p>Sex-based harassment is complex and impacts employees beyond those directly involved.</p> <p>With the inclusion of the positive duty in the legislative requirements, preventative action is a central aspect of compliance.</p> <p>Managers are now directly implicated in this when incidents occur, as both a first line of prevention and first responders. This requires all manager training to include content and practice that build knowledge and competency in identifying foreseeable risks, as well as effectively mitigating those risks before incidents occur.</p> <p>This action is a critical part of ensuring a safe, respectful and equal employment experience.</p>	81



SECTION 3

Understanding actions

This section provides further information on your selected actions.

Use the framework in Appendix 2 to help align and prioritise the actions you will keep in your plan.



01

Use job redesign to deepen your recruitment candidate pool

Job design is the planning of what, how, where, when and by whom work activities are arranged.

Research suggests that tasks and activities, and the way they are configured within a given 'job', can be gendered.

Inputs such as the previous incumbent, occupational or industry norms, and even the original job design process, can be gendered - with corollary effects on who takes interest in the job and who might stay engaged once they are in it.



How does it work?

Applying a gender lens to the design of a job can highlight barriers and bias that may be embedded in the architecture of a given job. Addressing these can have a positive impact on workforce composition through improving attraction and retention for the role.

What could you achieve?

Improved attraction:

The transition from interest in a job to lodging an application is influenced by the potential candidate's sense of job/person fit.

This develops when a potential candidate starts to consider key information about the job. They may take cues on this from the job ad, position description, previous exposure to similar jobs, and information and interactions with key personnel involved in recruitment. They build a mental model of the ideal candidate for the job and form a tacit understanding of what will constitute success in the role and how closely they might fit that ideal. This shapes the potential candidate's decision to "self-select out" or progress an application.²

Increased retention:

Job expectations and specific job needs can be influenced by gender, these differences can impact engagement and retention.

Women and men perceive various jobs and occupations and view the skills and experiences associated with these roles differently. This 'gender lens' impacts the tasks and activity inputs in the job design process and has implications for performance expectations and the relative value of the work from within the role.

It can also lead to gender differences in remuneration, job classifications and grading, as well as performance ratings, development opportunities and other aspects of the employee lifecycle experience.

Practitioner insights

- Note how the perception of the job, tasks and classifications may shift depending on the gender of the ideal imagined candidate. For example, are administration tasks viewed as 'leadership' activities when imagining a male incumbent?
- Assess remuneration similarly. How does the perception of the remuneration scale shift across gender? Does the relative value, required competency or importance of certain activities or tasks differ when you imagine a man or a woman in the role?
- Ensure a future-fit, gender-equal workforce by ensuring from the beginning that all new jobs and vacant positions are assessed with a gender lens.

Tracking progress

You can set goals and track your progress drawing on your existing WGEA reports and data points.

Suggestions for this action could include:

- increasing the representation of under-represented gender in a non-manager category
- increasing the representation of under-represented gender in a manager category
- increasing the representation of under-represented gender in promotions to manager.

² Chapman, Derek S., et al. "Applicant attraction to organizations and job choice: a meta-analytic review of the correlates of recruiting outcomes." *Journal of applied psychology* 90.5 (2005): 928



The bottom line

Applying a gender lens to the design of the job is an effective way to enhance attraction and retention outcomes, especially for the underrepresented cohort. Job redesign can de-gender the job/person fit, extending and deepening your talent pipeline and potential candidate pools.

This can then contribute to a more gender balanced workforce across specific jobs, occupations and job functions as well the workforce overall.

Useful resources

[Flexible work | WGEA](#)

[Flexible working arrangements | Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

[WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard 2022-23 | WGEA](#)

[Expanding Diversity through Part-Time Work Arrangements Masterclass](#)



02

Use talent and succession planning frameworks to improve your workforce gender composition

Talent and succession planning is a process used to identify critical positions within the workplace alongside plans to fill those positions with employees from within the organisation.

By applying a gender lens to new or existing talent and succession programs, you can identify and address gendered barriers and hidden biases that can be found in how these programs are assessed, developed and offered.



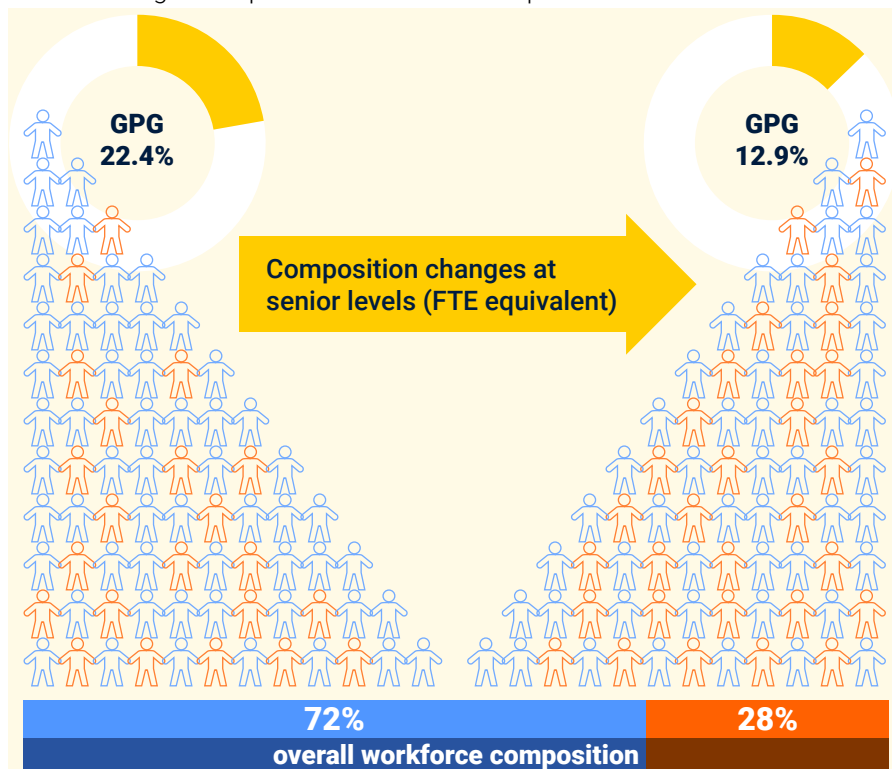
How does it work?

Developing a pipeline of talent for your enterprise should reflect and reinforce the organisation's commitment to gender equality. Talent and succession planning programs are often built on implicit mental models of 'ideal' incumbents and what constitutes 'high' performance.

Applying a gender lens to talent and succession programs can identify and address the gendered assumptions and their structural foundations that hinder equal access and participation in workplace promotion systems. Implementing this action can amplify workplace gender equality in several ways.

Narrowing the gender pay gap³

This action may be especially effective when applied to highly remunerated/senior management positions with visible impact.



Even if the overall gender composition of the organisation remains unchanged as above, creating new opportunities for women to participate at senior levels (both full time and part time) can significantly lower an organisation's gender pay gap.

Improving visibility and ambition of underrepresented gender

Gender equality experts have often observed "You can't be what you can't see", emphasising the power of role models. Expanding inclusion and increasing the mobility of your underrepresented gender can disrupt rigid associations between ideal candidates, talent and gender and can drive ambition.

Increasing diversity of skills and knowledge in the enterprise

The skills and competency frameworks that underpin identification and selection into a talent matrix can also be gendered - influenced by tacit associations between previous incumbents or successors and by what constitutes 'essential' skills and experience. Applying a gender lens to the criteria and profiles in these programs can expand both gender and capability frameworks.

Practitioner insights

Implementation

- Promote success stories and communicate the viability of internal progression to your target cohorts, especially at lower levels of the organisation, to drive inspiration and long-term engagement.
- Encourage existing managers to think more broadly about 'talent' and criteria for suitable successors.
- Look for opportunities to expand and embed modified and alternative talent profiles into related employee experiences such as recruitment, performance evaluations and reward and recognition programs.

³ Broader organisational benefits can also be realised beyond gender, including reduced costs and organisational risk through improved knowledge transfer and continuity of service.



The bottom line

Applying a gender lens to the design of the job is an effective way to enhance attraction and retention outcomes, especially for the underrepresented cohort. Job redesign can de-gender the job/person fit, extending and deepening your talent pipeline and potential candidate pools.

This can then contribute to a more gender balanced workforce across specific jobs, occupations and job functions as well the workforce overall.

Useful resources

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 gender equality indicators | WGEA](#)

[Job design: a practitioner's guide | Academy to Innovate HR](#)



03

Undertake a gender impact assessment of your performance evaluation process

Performance evaluation systems can be deeply linked to opportunities for progress, development and promotion. They are often tied directly to remuneration, including bonus payments, and together present a common site of gendered disadvantage in the workplace.

Research suggests performance evaluation is an area of employee experience where gender inequality can be hidden or can often go unchecked⁴. Gender differences exist in the way men and women are evaluated in the workplace; from the nature and consistency of feedback given on performance, to the range of accomplishments considered within the evaluation cycle, and the ratings assigned to the performance itself. Men are always more likely to be viewed and rated more favourably than women, with profound impacts on women across other areas of the employment lifecycle.

Taking steps to identify and limit the influence of gender throughout the performance evaluation process is an effective way to drive more gender equal outcomes, having a positive impact for women across multiple areas of the employee lifecycle.

⁴ Gender equitable recruitment and promotion | WGEA



How does it work?

Applying a gender lens to the performance evaluation system can highlight how and where gendered bias might be influencing outcomes for women - and in ways that may not be readily apparent. It can reveal both structural issues embedded in the appraisal system itself and less tangible, but no less impacting, influences that include 'rater bias'⁵ and discrimination (unconscious and otherwise).

Narrow the gender pay gap

Where performance is tied to remuneration, including discretionary pay such as bonuses, this action can narrow the gender pay gap by recalibrating any pay for performance differences.

Improve workforce composition

Performance evaluations can be linked to development opportunities, progress and promotion opportunity, and entry to talent and succession programs. Fair and equitable pay and performance is a key driver of employee engagement and is linked to stay-or-go decisions. Reducing attrition increases diversity of thought and skills and, over time, improves talent pipelines and workforce composition.

Practitioner insights

Gender assessment

- Use a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to inform your gender analysis. Compare appraisal ratings, the nature and depth of feedback, and comments in appraisals - as well as remuneration and development outcomes - across gender.
- Where possible, deepen your assessment with intersecting variables closely associated with gender effects, including the parental status, education, age and patterns of work and the gender of the rater/supervisor. These can all be a hidden source of difference, and mask or amplify gendered effects in performance appraisal.
- Review the policies and procedures that govern performance evaluations as well as the system itself. For example, how is parental leave absence covered in the policy? How are team outcomes and performance assessed?

Potential program enhancements to remove gender bias

Provide gender attuned training for both employees and evaluators

- Include exposure to the way unconscious bias and gendered communication patterns can impact on ratings and assessments.

Implement multiple evaluators to triangulate assessment measures.

- Incorporate several evaluators into the program, to try to minimise subjectivity. Self-assessments and 360-degree evaluations that could include customer/client feedback can all be effective ways to offset subjective differences.

Continuously monitor and align the performance evaluation criteria.

- Ensure the criteria represents a fair and relevant view of performance expectations and capability as workplace culture evolves. For example, has hybrid work changed the way you can assess performance?

Integrate 'performance rubrics.

- Establish ahead of time, when setting performance plans, what 'fair', 'good' and 'great' looks like. This can provide a clear line of sight for both managers and employees, standardised across team members.

⁵ Rater bias occurs when an individual allows their existing bias (unconscious or conscious) to affect the outcomes of an evaluation process.



The bottom line

Limiting the influence of gender on the inputs and outcomes of the performance evaluation process creates a fairer experience for all employees. By examining the performance evaluation system through a gendered lens, you can increase standardisation, objectivity and transparency.

This has positive impacts on gender equality in the workplace overall, such as lasting effects on narrowing the gender pay gap, balancing workforce composition and delivering a strengthened employer value proposition.

Useful resources

WGEA resource: [Gender Equitable Recruitment and Promotion](#)

UK Equalities Office: [Gender Bias and Performance Feedback: An RCT](#)



04

Embed a skills-based assessment process into your recruitment program

Gendered disadvantage can be particularly difficult to identify and eliminate from the recruitment process. Evidence suggests women experience barriers and disadvantage at almost every stage of the process but perhaps especially during selection.



How does it work?

Traditional recruitment practices rely on selecting candidates through written application and then demonstrating suitability through personal interview. However, these processes provide a very limited way to assess competence and suitability. Further, they depend on the candidate's ability to self-promote and position their success in wholly individual terms. This mindset and style of communication is more strongly associated with men, who typically experience more favourable evaluations compared to women. By expanding the range of inputs into the selection processes, objectivity can be enhanced, and any gendered influences and latent bias can be minimised.

Inputs to consider adding to your recruitment process include⁶:

- **Blind recruitment:** Removing identifiable information (for example, candidates' names) from resumés can eliminate any potential gender bias regarding ideal candidates.⁷ This may also involve asking for 'total years of experience' on resumés, rather than a chronological format, to overcome signals of gender from events such as career breaks for parental leave
- **Psychometric testing:** These tests can assess a potential candidate's fit with workplace culture, team cohesion and future potential and capabilities
- **Simulated work tests:** These tests can assess skills and knowledge related to the role and help to predict future performance
- **Recruitment assessment centres:** Usually administered in a group setting and lasting several hours or more, these draw on a range of inputs that simulate and test core job competencies and enable several candidates to be assessed and compared in equally favourable conditions

What could you achieve?

This action can help organisations create a more gender balanced workforce composition by expanding the potential candidate pool and increasing the likelihood of success for a broader range of employees overall.

Over time, expanding the inputs to your selection can minimise some common barriers faced by women. Such obstacles include the emphasis on unbroken employment histories and only paid work experiences, to the favouring of full-time patterns of work and the notion of women having to achieve 'likability' at an interview, compared to men⁸.

Additional benefits of this action include:

Reduced attrition and recruitment costs

1. By including multiple inputs, the panel can make a more comprehensive and accurate evaluation of skills, qualifications and experiences. This enhances the ability to predict how well the candidate is likely to perform and stay in the role and add value.

Enhanced diversity and inclusion

2. Using a range of assessment methods can also increase the employer's exposure to different ideals, skills and aptitudes, including their different presentations across gender and other individual differences. This can contribute to improving the culture and reputation of the employer and, over time, can modify and evolve ideal candidate profiles and worker norms.

⁶ Please note that some of the inputs listed below have mixed evidence when it comes to gender equal outcomes. Careful consideration is encouraged when determining suitability for your specific workplace context.

⁷ Why gender-blind recruiting could lead to more women CEOs | Melbourne Business School

⁸ Inclusive Recruitment at Work: Synopsis | DCA



Practitioner insights

- Amplify the impact of this action by building a deeper, gender balanced candidate pool from the beginning. Communicating your recruitment process - emphasising its objectivity - can encourage applications from a broader range of candidates. This can be especially encouraging for women who have been found more likely to apply when they perceive a fair and equitable process for selection.
- Ensure your recruitment panel training includes information on the influence of gender in attraction and selection and embed the necessary checks and balances for this into your policies, processes and procedures.
- Take this action to the next level by applying an intersectional lens to your recruitment practices. This can address some associated biases and barriers that can contribute to a gendered workforce composition. Age, parental status and ethnicity can mask or amplify gendered barriers in recruitment for women.

The bottom line

Incorporating multiple inputs into the recruitment process, with a focus on demonstrating skills and capabilities relating to the role, can minimise the influence of gender on selection decisions and create a more level playing field for candidates overall.

This action can help employers build a more gender balanced pipeline of talent and narrow their gender pay gaps through improving the gender balance of their workforce composition.

Useful resources

WGEA Resource: **Gender equitable recruitment and promotion**

Behavioural Insights Team: **How to improve gender equality: how to use skill-based assessment tasks**

DCA: **Inclusive Recruitment at Work**



05

Undertake a gender impact assessment of your recruitment and promotion policies

Reflecting on how different genders experience the recruitment and promotion process is an effective way to progress a more gender balanced workforce and reduce gender segregation across jobs, levels and occupations in the workplace.



How does it work?

Recruitment and promotion are highly interpersonal employer activities. Policies that govern these interactions rely on engineering an objective and standardised set of conditions that enable the most suitable person for the job to emerge from the candidate pool.

The level of objectivity required for this outcome can be greatly diminished when gender differences, in both outcome and experience, are left unchecked and unaddressed at the policy level. There are several areas of the recruitment and promotion process that are most susceptible to gendered bias. Attending to these areas of concern in the relevant workplace policies can have a positive effect on rebalancing gendered workforce compositions and can contribute to narrowing the gender pay gap.

Policy areas to consider in your assessment:

- **Advertisement:** Studies have shown the language used in job advertisements can have different effects on men and women, and often deter women from applying⁹.
- **Shortlisting:** Resumés attached to female names are less likely to be short listed for interview¹⁰. Gendered assumptions about 'role suitability' have also been examined where women were perceived as less suitable for leadership or highly technical roles compared to men¹¹.
- **Interviews:** Numerous studies indicate that, even when there are strict selection criteria, assessors are influenced by subtle gendered biases that can result in women and men being evaluated differently. Women are more likely to be judged negatively on their physical appearance and demeanour compared to men. Both male and female panel members are equally likely to favour male candidates overall¹².
- **Performance:** Women are more likely to be evaluated less favourably in performance evaluations, with men more likely to be evaluated favourably on their future potential¹³.
- **Promotion:** The bias towards years of experience and unbroken employment as an accurate proxy for high performance and potential means that women who step away from work to care for children are less likely to be promoted compared to men. They are also perceived as less committed and less ambitious, which can impact their access to 'stretch assignments' - projects or work which may be deemed beyond their capabilities. In turn, this can adversely impact their lifetime earnings¹⁴.

⁹ Gaucher, D., Friesen, J., & Kay, A. (2011). Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 109-128.

¹⁰ UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN HIRING IN THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE | BETA

¹¹ Tremmel, M., & Wahl, J. (2023). Gender stereotypes in leadership: Analyzing the content and evaluation of stereotypes about typical, male, and female leaders. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1034258.

¹² Gender and negotiation in the workplace | WGEA

¹³ Gender equitable recruitment and promotion | WGEA

¹⁴ Removing the motherhood penalty | WGEA



What could you achieve?

A gender impact assessment is an effective way to progress a more balanced workforce composition and inform improvements to your recruitment and promotions policy.

Undertaking this analysis will highlight the potential source of gender inequality in your promotions and their related attraction and selection processes, including job ads, interview processes, selection criteria, performance evaluation processes and broader promotion criteria.

Your review will highlight potential sources of gender bias and inequality that can impact on your workforce composition and gender pay gap.

Practitioner Insights

To maximise impact, your assessment should assess each segment of the policy and ask:

How might men and women view and experience this differently? To what effect? ¹⁵

Your analysis can:

- Draw on both qualitative and quantitative data in your impact assessments to deepen understanding of how and where gender impacts are occurring.
- Include past internal and external candidates in your review to give a three-dimensional perspective of the perceptions and experiences invoked by application of the policies.
- Embed gender impact assessments as part a continuous improvement process on gender equality, to amplify and accelerate results.

	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse gender composition of appointments (and appointment rates) by department, occupation group, pay grade and any other relevant category • Analyse gender composition of promotions (and promotion rates) by department, occupation group, pay grade and any other relevant category 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess language in recent job advertisements for gender neutrality • Evaluate channels used for posting job ads and their audiences • Examine the shortlisting process and selection criteria with a gender lens for any embedded bias or gendered assumptions that may be influencing results • Assess interview questions and formats for consistency and any gender bias
Promotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse performance evaluation gradings by gender. Additionally, you may find it beneficial to break down the data by department, occupation group, pay grade, gender of manager and any other relevant category • Analyse participation in training, mentorship programs or development opportunities by gender. Additionally, you may find it beneficial to break down the data by department, occupation group, pay grade, gender of manager and any other relevant category 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review performance evaluation criteria and processes, checking for gender biases and for consistency in how they are applied • Assess promotion criteria with a gender lens, checking that it is transparent, objective and equally accessible to all genders • Evaluate access to training, mentorship and development opportunities with a gender lens. Check for any structural biases that may prevent any gender from participating

¹⁵ The policy remedies for many outcomes that may emerge from your GIA can be found in other actions in this playbook. For example, gender targeted job advertisements, and be used to guide a broader action plan.



The bottom line

Completing a gender impact assessment on your recruitment and promotion policies is a powerful way to ensure that you are maximising the opportunity to improve and progress your workforce composition and narrow your gender pay gap, by removing or minimising opportunity for gender bias or barriers to participation.

Useful resources

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 gender equality indicators | WGEA](#)
[Gender equitable recruitment and promotion | WGEA](#)



06

Embed a gender informed approach into job advertising

Offering flexibility can be highly effective

Nine out of 10 employees report they look for flexibility as an employment condition.

A third of Australian employees who are working flexibly already report they would immediately quit their job or start looking for a new one if they were required to return to the office full time.

At a time when unemployment is at record lows and employers are struggling to fill vital roles, recent research found that advertising flexible working options led to a 20% to 30% increase in applicant pools.

Source: WGEA Media Release: Rise in flexible work good for gender equality, but employers cautioned not to just 'set and forget'

Gender-targeted job advertisements use specific language to attract a target cohort to specific positions. Understanding the impacts of gendered language in job ads has been a focus of recruitment practice for some time.

The evidence suggests the language used in job ads can encourage or deter would-be candidates from applying for a position and, in this way, can have a direct impact on gender segregation and workforce composition.



How does it work?

Shifting to gender neutral words in job ads does not always solve the issues that can drive gendered candidate pools. It is commonly accepted, however, that certain words and phrases can encourage more women to apply.

The language used in job ads can reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes and invoke a gendered perception of the ideal candidate and the nature of the role. Words such as *ambitious*, *driven* or *innovative*, for example, can be strongly associated with men, while words including *conscientious*, *collaborative* and *interpersonal* can be more strongly associated with women.

Common practice is to replace gendered words with more neutral terms. There are times, however, where feminine coded language may be preferable. Research indicates this has a neutral effect on men whilst resonating more positively with women, and in ways that can encourage application. This can deepen your candidate pools for a given role by ensuring high-potential women are less likely to self-select out, with cumulative effects on gendered workforce composition. When applied to recruitment for roles that have traditionally attracted low levels of interest from women (or men), using neutral language can be most effective.

Practitioner insights

- Even when substituting gender coded language with more gender-neutral terms, many of the interchangeable descriptors refer to personal attributes. This can undermine attempts to create a more gender inclusive focus foregrounding skills and capability
- Some words are so deeply embedded and co-opted in everyday language that they invoke the very thing you might be seeking to neutralise. Parental leave is a good example – despite the gender-neutral term, the image it conjures is not always materially different to that of maternity leave. Conversely, when using paternity leave, the image invoked is of fathers. So, it's important to consider the contemporary and colloquial understanding of words and phrasing
- There are times when employers need to do more than simply 'not deter' women from applying. They may wish to actively engage an underrepresented cohort in the attraction framework. This could apply to targeting women candidates as much as wanting to target men (for example, in healthcare/nursing) and is an instance in which gender targeted rather than gender neutral language is appropriate
- In your job ad, encourage candidates to call to discuss the role. Research suggests having a positive interaction and connection with the hiring manager (or recruiter) enhances the likelihood of an application
- There is some evidence that providing details of the selection process and highlighting its objectivity can increase the chances that women will apply. Women tend to include the likelihood of getting the job in their deliberations up to application, so the objectivity of the process is a meaningful input they could consider.

Take time to understand the gendered barriers and gateways to applying for the role. Understanding the differences (if any) between how men and women who are already in the job, level or occupation see the role, what attracted them to it and why they stay, can help you craft a well informed and targeted job ad (or ads) to attract a more gender balanced candidate pool.



The bottom line

Taking a gender informed approach to advertising can support your broader strategies for change to workforce composition. Using gender targeted job ads can draw on the power of gender coded language to bring the role on to the radar of a target pipeline and amplify the likelihood that your target candidate will apply for the position.



07

Use mentorship and sponsorship to improve your workforce gender composition

Mentorship can be a formal or informal relationship between a more-experienced individual (mentor) and a less-experienced individual (mentee). Sponsorship involves proactive and instrumental action to advance a person's career.

Research shows both interventions can enhance gender equality outcomes; however, sponsorship is known to have a more material and positive outcome for career progression.

Evidence has found gendered influences and outcomes for both mentorship and sponsorship programs. Employers can apply a gender impact assessment to the development and implementation of these programs to address unintentional bias or gendered outcomes that may emerge from the structure of these programs, and to maximise the attraction and retention benefits.



How does it work?

Workplace mentoring programs pair an experienced worker (usually a manager or other leader) with an individual of less experience and emerging capabilities. The mentor acts as a role model and adviser to the mentee. The aim is to assist their growth and development and maximise potential for success in the workplace context. This program focuses on expanding the individual's capacity for high performance and competency as defined by the organisation.

Sponsorship programs extend the talent development focus of mentoring. The main difference between sponsorship and mentoring is that sponsorship programs draw on the sponsor's position and influence to actively leverage promotion and stretch opportunities for their participant.

A sponsor can act as a mentor and develop the capability of the participant, but the aim is less focused on building the individual's capabilities and preparing them for success and more on actively creating pathways to enable that talent to grow in the execution of a role.

Gender attuned mentoring or sponsorship programs have been found to benefit performance and career outcomes. They have been linked most especially to promotion and performance acceleration for women into senior ranks.

Both have nuanced strengths and limitations, and outcomes can be shaped by a range of factors including the culture, purpose and framing of the program in the gender equality strategy or action plan. Gendered effects that can emerge as result of these programs are outlined below and should be considered in the design and implementation. This is the essence of a 'gender attuned' mentoring or sponsorship program.

Mentoring and sponsorship programs can help organisations attract and retain key talent and improve their workplace composition in two ways:

- directly, through building capability in preparation for progress and promotion (succession)
- indirectly, through retention effects, ensuring gains in gender composition are sustained.

These programs work best when part of a structured framework that establishes key outcomes and objectives, and when they are linked to broader succession and talent development programs. They can be particularly effective for women. When the design of the program considers the explicit and latent influences of gender on the participation of women, the program can also act to recalibrate gendered workforce compositions.



Practitioner insights

Applying a gender lens to your frameworks will help build a more inclusive and effective program.

Monitor Backlash

Mentoring and sponsorship programs can create discord in non-participant cohorts and result in backlash against participants. The program could be perceived as unfairly advantaging women in the workplace, or, in some cases, taken as an affirmation of gaps in competency, especially for women. Both can have negative outcomes on climate and culture.

What to look out for?

Regular feedback from participants and mentors or sponsors can help in gauging if backlash is occurring. Ensuring the rationale and aims of the program are well considered and communicated can help, including anticipating and addressing gendered concerns. Exploring these issues with participants in advance and through pre-program training can also assist and support addressing concerns.

Benevolent sexism

Mentors and sponsors have a range of motivations for participating in these programs and, in most cases, they are well meaning. However, sponsors can also use their participation to spotlight their own allyship rather than focus on developing the participants' skills and knowledge. Particularly when applied to women, it can unwittingly reinforce the notion that women are 'others' in the workplace and depend on the power of a sponsor to succeed and progress.

What to look out for?

Language is a good source of understanding and can express how the sponsor considers and positions their involvement and role in the program. Written feedback, tasks and observation of sponsors in training can all help, noting any missteps are usually unconscious and should be considered part of the learning curve. Sponsors and mentors have as much to gain from these experiences as participants. Presenting the program to mentors and sponsors in this way, creating an opportunity for their growth and drawing on their experience to improvement and progress, is just as important for gender equality as the program itself.



Co-dependency

Sponsorship programs can shape the course of a career. As a beneficiary of a sponsorship relationship, participants may feel indebted to the sponsor. Alternatively, it may limit confidence in their own abilities where the participants attribute their success to the sponsor and not their own competency or development. This could limit rather than expand career choices and progression.

What to look out for?

Low variety in mobility following the program, or mobility only within the sponsor's line of delegation.

Unchecked bias

Gender stereotypes may still influence mentorship dynamics. For example, there might be assumptions about the types of roles or projects that are suitable for individuals based on their gender, limiting the scope of mentorship discussions and opportunities.

What to look out for?

Monitoring and evaluation can help here with open feedback mechanisms and regular within-cohort assessment undertaken periodically. For example, do some participants seem to have a greater variety in mobility, roles and responsibilities compared to peers? Are more gender typical pathways being followed for some mentees compared to others?

Reduced or differential access

Women, particularly in certain industries or from different cultural backgrounds, may face challenges related to access and availability to these programs; for example, working part time or using alternative work arrangements. Others may have specific cultural or social needs that may limit their access. It's important not to exclude these women from consideration. Find ways to modify participation to accommodate individual needs and intersectional gender effects.

What to look out for?

Low levels of interest, higher than expected attrition and/or evidence of cancelled or missed meetings can all be signals of concern. Gender attuned programs should have mechanisms in place for independent feedback and evaluation. Pre-course training should cover these issues to ensure participants can consider and address these in advance. For example, agree on options for the location of meetings, and embed regular feedback sessions between participants and sponsors with convenors, so any issues that emerge can be explored and addressed.



The bottom line

Whilst these programs are often developed and implemented to progress gender equality, they are not altogether immune from gender biases. Addressing these issues requires a proactive approach from the organisations and mentors.

Establishing sponsorship and mentorship programs that are inclusive and provide clear objectives and training for all participants, and progress to tangible outcomes, can contribute to a more equitable and effective experience both within the program and in the wider workplace.

They foster a supportive workplace culture characterised by employees committing to each other's development and prosperity, and proactively addressing the gendered barriers to progression often experienced by women.

Useful resources

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 gender equality indicators | WGEA](#)

[Supporting careers - mentoring or sponsorship | WGEA](#)



08

Improve facilities and supports available for employees with caring responsibilities

A large proportion of Australians have caring duties, and these can often present barriers to workforce participation. According to 2021 Australian census data, 3.4 million families had dependents, of which 81.7% were families with children under the age of 15.¹⁶ Additionally, there are 3 million Australians with caring responsibilities for older people or people with disability.¹⁷

When employers provide facilities and supports for employees to balance work with caring responsibilities, it can remove significant barriers to workforce participation for both women and men. It also acknowledges and legitimises that work and family can and should be harmonised and, when facilities are developed for all parents, including fathers, they can effectively break down the ideal worker/carer norms.

¹⁶ Labour Force Status of Families, June 2023 | Australian Bureau of Statistics

¹⁷ Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2022



How does it work?

There are numerous options for improving the supports available to employees to manage their care obligations alongside work. Whilst each provides a different level of assistance, the upside is the same - improved engagement and ability to attract and retain talent. With most of the caring undertaken by women, the potential to improve gendered workforce compositions can be tangible.

Employers can improve attraction and retention by offering a better range of supports to those seeking to manage work and care. Improved offerings can become part of the employer value proposition and may be used to attract specific target cohorts to the employer/workplace.

Consultation with employees is the most useful first step to gauge existing, individual needs and circumstances, and to project plan for those that may arise in the future.

Childcare facilities

The cost of childcare is a significant factor in many carers choosing not to return to work, so assistance with childcare can be a significant driver of employee engagement.¹⁸

Onsite childcare facilities will not be widely feasible for all employers so adjacent supports and offerings could also be considered. These might include:

- securing priority places at local centres
- funding discounts at local providers
- salary packaging of childcare fees
- childcare allowances or rebates
- fully funded or subsidised emergency care where an employee is required to work and other care is not available
- provisions for employees to travel with children aged under 18 months.

Breastfeeding facilities

It is a workplace's responsibility to ensure breastfeeding employees are not disadvantaged or forced to wean their babies before they are ready. The right to breastfeed is enshrined in Australian Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation. Additionally, a growing number of employers are supporting employees to take paid lactation breaks.

Coaching for employees returning to work

Return-to-work coaching is a feature of WGEA's leading practice organisations. Savvy organisations will ensure this is offered to any employee returning from protracted leave while caring, including men with caring responsibilities, breaking down rigid ideal worker and carer norms.

Dedicated care - friendly workspaces

Sometimes it may be appropriate to take family members into the workplace. Whilst working from home is likely to be the preferred option in most cases, having spaces in the workplace that can accommodate work and care can provide a viable alternative for those who might need it.

Quiet rooms and private spaces

Access to a private room to discuss private matters relating to the care and support of a family member or friend can be much needed and appreciated. Other useful offerings can include onsite or subsidised parking, concierge services and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services.

¹⁸ Employer of Choice for Gender Equality: Leading Practices in Strategy, Policy and Implementation | University of Queensland



Practitioner insights

- Ensure services and facilities are accessible to all staff regardless of gender, focusing on physical barriers but also how they are promoted and discussed, avoiding gendered implications about their intended purpose.
- Ensure any physical spaces provided for family members are safe and free from hazards and meet expected OHS and hygiene standards.
- Promote and encourage the use of services and facilities reinforcing leadership expectations of active support for carers.
- Be aware of cultural expectations, particularly the normalised view of caring as a maternal role, and ensure you consider caregiving needs beyond those relating to children.

The bottom line

Providing support and facilities to carers can reduce the real and perceived trade-off between work and care. This can make caring more feasible for all workers and serves to combat traditional gendered expectations of who provides care. By normalising the managing of work alongside care, the gendered impacts of caring on career progression and employee experiences can be reduced.

This will have positive effects on creating a more balanced workforce composition.

Useful resources

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 gender equality indicators | WGEA](#)

[Supporting careers – mentoring or sponsorship | WGEA](#)



09

Increase part-time work and job-share options for all staff

Working full-time is still considered the norm in most workplaces. Appetite for reducing working hours to accommodate needs outside of work is likely to differ across genders and at different stages of the employee lifecycle, for example, caregiving, travel, study and transition into retirement.

Creating genuine opportunities for flexibility of working hours gives an organisation a strong advantage in attracting and retaining talent – and will also address issues and disparities in workforce composition.



How does it work?

Mainstreaming part-time and job-share options sends a strong message to employees about the organisation's commitment to gender equality.

This action works to break down ideal 'worker norms' as an employee who works a full-time pattern of hours, is unencumbered by caregiving responsibilities and is always available –by extension, more likely to be a man.

Mainstreaming part-time and job-share work can have powerful impacts on several aspects of gendered experience. This includes breaking down assumptions that part-time patterns of work are the exclusive domain of women and are incompatible with leadership and senior positions. It also challenges the presumption that flexible work arrangements almost exclusively appeal to working parents, in particular mothers.

Normalising flexible work arrangements such as these can make access to leadership and senior roles more readily available to women. Similarly, the employer would be sending a signal that programs such as succession planning and development would no longer simply be the domain of full-time workers.

Additional scope is also made possible for return-to-work options for parents, or conversely the take up of greater primary care by fathers, transition-to-retirement programs and structured exposure to stretch assignments and portfolios.

Practitioner insights

Apply this action to new roles and vacancies as well existing positions.

In all cases it is important to monitor and evaluate the impacts and ensure that implementing this action does not have unintended consequences.

To this end, things to consider include:

- **Negative effects on engagement:** Ensure employees transitioning to part-time or job-share roles do not feel undervalued, suffer backlash or experience reduced access to employee benefits and arrangements compared to full-time employees
- **Deepening norms regarding gender and part-time work:** This may happen if women opt in more than men.
- **Providing manager training:** This will assist and support managers to adapt and attend to some of the nuances of management that emerge because of managing job-share partners or part-time workers

Maximising opportunities to promote part-time and job-share across a range of contexts, including take up by men, as well as ensuring that employee consultation and feedback mechanisms are in place for incumbents, will help in making these transitions.



The bottom line

With good planning and design, creating genuine opportunities to work part-time and job-share can benefit both employees and the organisation.

It may be particularly effective when applied to senior positions and managers. Employees will have more choice about how they balance work and their commitments, while employers will be simultaneously normalising part-time employment and providing a more substantive access for women to senior positions and meaningful work.

This will have a direct and cumulative impact on workplace culture, reconfiguring ideal worker/ideal carer norms that have proved to be a significant barrier to gender equality.

Useful resources

[Flexible work | WGEA](#)

[Flexible working arrangements | Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

[WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard 2022-23 | WGEA](#)



10

Undertake a gender impact assessment of governing body recruitment and performance

Issues and considerations of gender balance go right to the top of an organisation.

The gender composition of boards and governing bodies can send a message that reflects well – or not – about the organisation's overall approach to gender balance.

Expanding an organisation's talent pool to build a more gender balanced board or governing body is crucial. This can be accomplished by undertaking a gender audit of your appointment and performance procedures, as well as other elements of board appointment, such as succession planning and term limits.

A gender impact assessment of recruitment, position descriptions, contracts and performance agreements have the potential to uncover hidden and explicit barriers to women being appointed to these positions. In some cases, it can also identify what prevented them from applying in the first place. This can also be a foundational step in setting gender composition targets for your board or governing body, providing a more thorough understanding of what barriers exist to meeting those targets.

Testing assumptions that relate to the critical skills and knowledge required for each role is essential for this action to work effectively.



How does it work?

A gender impact assessment is a process of reflection that considers how programs, actions or policies might be experienced and how they might create outcomes that affect genders differently. It is an extension of existing decision-making processes that requires decision makers to examine differences among genders, so that they can address gender inequalities.

This type of assessment is critical for organisations to ensure they are fostering gender equality from the decision-making levels. This will have positive impacts throughout the entire organisation.

It occurs in two ways.

Firstly, enhancing the quality and impact of strategies, actions and decisions endorsed and governed by the board or equivalent. More gender balanced boards, for example, are strongly associated with greater profit, shareholder return, employee engagement and reduced material risk.

Secondly, the higher level of decision making within the organisation will serve as a role model of expected action and 'aspiration for gender composition' - and the realisation that change is possible.

Practitioner insights

The scope of the gender impact assessment may include assessing recruitment process from role design, job description and advertisement/candidate sourcing through to selection criteria, shortlisting and final appointment, depending on the overall gender equality strategy and identified need.

In addition, it is crucial to ensure that the environment in which women are entering is conducive to capitalising on the diversity benefits. Having women without a voice or sense of belonging at the table, drawing on their gender to progress gender issues, or not making conscious decisions on the diversity of the gender composition, can all have important effects on both impact and retention.

A good place to start is understanding the experience of current members of your governing body and examining differences across gender and other facets, such as tenure, education and age. This will help to determine useful profiles of the capability and skills needed in addition to gender.

Some critical questions you could include in your analysis are:

- Is gender-coded language being used in candidate profiles and postings for board and governing body roles?
- Is the talent pool for candidate sourcing diverse? Are there alternative pools that are untapped? Is the organisation using formal and/or informal networks to identify and select candidates?
- Are selection criteria based on relevant skills and experiences? Are there gendered assumptions influencing criteria?
- Is the interview process standardised? Is the panel responsible for appointments gender diverse?
- Is succession planning gender attuned?
- Could term limits present gendered barriers for potential candidates?
- How are existing women appointees engaged in the board structure? For example, are they used as proxy voices for women? How does this differ or converge from men?



The bottom line

Applying the objective and critical review framework inherent in a gender impact assessment to governing body attraction and retention drivers is a good start. But powerful action is needed to build more gender equal outcomes across the enterprise.

This can enhance the gender composition of a decision-making body directly, and positively impact governance-related issues including mitigation, performance, reputation, value, and legal and compliance requirements.

Useful resources

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 gender equality indicators | WGEA](#)

[Board recruitment | AICD](#)



11

Identify and establish alternative ways to encourage diverse decision-making for governing bodies

An example of this in action is the Executive Director of UN Women, who has convened the Civil Society Advocacy Group, comprising 14 feminist advocates. They advise the Executive Director on strategic and political issues and contribute ideas and strategies for UN Women's policies and programs. This allows for the reception and incorporation of specialist advice in decision-making processes while overcoming the barriers to direct participation within UN Women's decision-making body.

Read more about the group [here](#).

It is not always feasible to address the gender balance of Boards and Governing Bodies in the short to medium term, such as in the case of recent appointments or appointments outside the organisation's control (for example, governance via an international Board).

In such contexts, the benefits of a more gender diverse board or decision-making body can be achieved by setting up alternatives such as an Advisory Committee, Consultative Council or similar.

These can provide gender informed specialist advice, mitigate risk, and stimulate diverse thinking through input processes like those gained from a more gender-balanced board.



How does it work?

There are several ways governing bodies can access specialist advice and perspectives. A common way is to establish an alternative advisory committee. Advisory committees can provide specialised advice, insights and recommendations on specific issues or areas of concern.

A gender equality or diversity and inclusion advisory committee might:

- assess current diversity and inclusion metrics and report to the board
- recommend strategies for improving representation and inclusivity
- help to monitor the implementation of any gender equality initiatives
- provide training and resources to the board on gender equality.

This action can provide all the benefits that can arise from creating a gender balanced governing body, including enhancing the quality and impact of strategies, actions and decisions made and/or endorsed by the Board or its equivalent. It also includes profit, shareholder return, employee engagement and reduced material risk. The higher level of decision making within the organisation will serve as a role model of expected action and aspiration gender composition, and the realisation that change is possible.

Practitioner insights

A committee or advisory board approach is most effective with the following elements included:

- **Diverse representation:** Strive to bring together a wide variety of experiences and viewpoints that are relevant to the sought-after gender equality outcomes, as well as having an appropriate level of expertise. This committee should also represent the interests of different levels of the organisation, from senior leaders to frontline staff.
- **Clear remit:** The committee should have a clear remit, which is to be respected and supported by the governing body, to ensure that it remains focused on its specific and defined purpose and is treated as the leading authority in this area.
- **Adequate resourcing:** The committee must be adequately resourced, so it is able to function effectively and is sustainable in the long term.
- **Regular reporting mechanisms:** These must be implemented to ensure the committee is heard, and it should be held to account against relevant KPIs. KPIs can also be used to enforce commitment to actions that the committee proposes and that are agreed upon.
- **Feedback mechanisms:** A method of formalising feedback from employees/stakeholders should be created, and consultation on gender equality should be mainstreamed, rather than just being done ad hoc in pursuit of short-term outcomes.
- **Periodic reviews:** Proposed actions and ideas from committees should be periodically reviewed. Where decision makers have not adopted a committee's ideas, this should be remedied.
- **Staff transparency:** Maintain transparency with all staff about the views of the committee so that in cases of Boards repeatedly rejecting ideas, the committee retains some influence and can build momentum for its proposals.



The bottom line

Even in cases where board or governing body composition is rigid, a diverse and qualified range of voices can be amplified by expanding the capabilities of experts to influence organisational decision-makers.

This action allows more thorough consideration of strategies and issues that may not be ordinarily discussed by governing bodies, leading to more knowledge-driven action that can progress towards gender equality.

While this is an effective, almost immediately implementable measure, it should not stop long-term efforts to work towards a gender equal composition of Boards and governing bodies.

Useful resources

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 gender equality indicators | WGEA](#)

[A director's guide to accelerating workplace gender equality | WGEA](#)

[What is the role and importance of an advisory board? | AICD](#)

[Nomination committee charter | AICD](#)



12

Undertake a gender pay gap analysis

A gender pay gap analysis is a powerful way an organisation can identify the areas of difference in its employee experience contributing to the gender pay gap.

The analysis focuses on gender differences in experience or outcomes across several key areas of the employment lifecycle. This can inform an employer's gender equality action plan. Each area of difference identified in the analysis is called a 'hot spot' – offering both an opportunity and potential challenge to delivering a gender equal experience for the workforce.¹⁹

¹⁹ There is a separate remuneration analysis process that can be used to discover instances of unequal pay, available at the [Equal Pay Handbook](#) | Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.



How does it work?

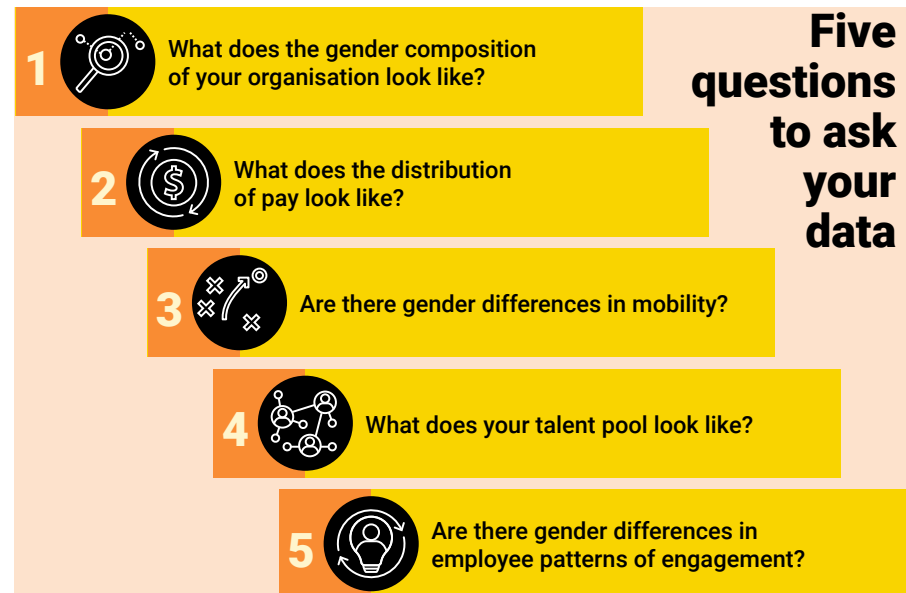
The gender pay gap analysis focuses effort across five key areas of interest and potential opportunity. These are common areas where 'hot spots' can be found and are extremely useful for informing where to focus attention in developing your action plan.

A comprehensive analysis requires gender data that spans:

- your workforce composition
- the distribution of pay across the workforce
- how and where the workforce is progressing and leaving
- your talent pools
- patterns of work and engagement.

A lot of this data is captured as part of WGEA gender equality reporting; however, the efficacy of your action will be greatly improved by drawing on data points beyond the scope of annual reporting.

Useful inputs will include, for example, exit interview data, composition of your candidate pools and the gender aggregated outcomes of your performance planning process.



The gender pay gap analysis will identify the employee experiences and outcomes that are contributing to your gender pay gap. Each will have a unique influence and contribution to your overall gender pay gap. Understanding the nature and extent of these 'hot spots' enables employers to take effective action, increasing effectiveness and ensuring alignment with context and aspirations of your enterprise.

Progress can be achieved across any areas of your employee experience and will amplify outcomes across the related gender equality indicators.

Evidence suggests achievement is enhanced by:

- undertaking a gender pay gap analysis at least annually
- incorporating principles and processes into routine decision making – for example, checking impact of remuneration for new starts etc.

It is important to note that reducing the gender pay gap is a long-term undertaking that will occur over time.

There are few cases where gender pay gaps will shift drastically in a reporting period. A strong relationship between employer gender pay gaps and your workforce composition is a primary reason that changes happen over time, as you rebalance your workforce in the hot spots identified. Fixing the like-for-like differences is necessary but not sufficient to generate lasting change.

Practitioner insights

Remain mindful that a gender pay gap is a leading indicator of unequal experiences, however it is just a proxy for gender inequality and should not be treated as an infallible indicator. This is why it is critical to ensure your analysis is thorough and can identify underlying hot spots in the data that may be distinct from the overall pay gap – although very likely contributing to it

- Gender pay gap analysis is a foundational step and is ineffective if it is not met with thoughtful, constructive action planning. Identifying hot spots and resolving to fix them is insufficient; there must be a commitment to address the hot spots with specific, relevant actions, including those throughout this guide. The analysis simply serves to identify which actions are most necessary and likely to be effective
- In many cases, this analysis will reveal several hot spots, and there can be temptation to act on as many as possible immediately. Prioritising these hot spots to focus on the most glaring and rectifiable areas of the organisation is a wiser approach, particularly initially.



The bottom line

A gender pay gap analysis is a diagnostic process and is crucial for a good, data-driven foundation for any action planning. Bypassing it can lead to inefficiency, limited progress or even regression.

This analysis provides a profound insight into so many aspects of an organisation, and greatly simplifies the action planning process, when done correctly.

Useful resources

[Gender Pay Gap Analysis Guide | WGEA](#)

[Register for Capacity Building Masterclasses | WGEA](#)

[Employer Gender Pay Gap Technical Guide | WGEA](#)



13

Correct cases of unequal pay (i.e. like-for-like pay gaps)

Employers have a legal requirement to identify and remediate any instances of unequal pay (sometimes referred to as like-for-like gender pay gaps).

Equal pay is where people are paid the same for performing the same role or different work of equal or comparable value. In Australia, this has been a legal requirement since 1969.



How does it work?

It is possible for two employees doing the same (or comparable) work to be paid different amounts.

It will take more than just looking for the pay differentials to remedy like-for-like gaps. Addressing this effectively will rely on locating differences first, then applying a critical lens across the discrepancies to check if any or all those discrepancies are truly 'justified'.

- When factors such as tenure or education emerge as the rationale, is the rationale articulated and tested?
- If the starting salary negotiated on commencement is the factor driving differences, can this be corrected? If not, why not? What can be done to prevent this from recurring?
- If employees working part time emerge in your analysis, are the reduced hours the only factor of difference? Consider how access to development, presenteeism and unconscious or conscious assumptions are driving remuneration outcomes. Are these reflected in performance outcomes?

While differences in remuneration between employees can sometimes be justified, differences in skills and knowledge alone may not be enough to meet compliance obligations. Understanding how those differences are reflected in different performance outcomes and expectations is helpful, to challenge the existing rationales.

Practitioner insights

Review

Several processes can be undertaken to identify instances of unequal pay:

1. **Adopt a job level lens within a full gender pay gap analysis.** This involves disaggregating job titles by gender, to look for instances where individuals are paid different amounts. If any pay discrepancies are identified among employees who share the same job title, a deeper investigation of those individual cases would then be undertaken to determine whether there are any justifiable reasons for pay difference.
2. **Identify jobs of comparable value.** This is a more involved process that requires a structured evaluation of the skills and roles attached to two or more jobs, to determine whether pay setting has been equitable, including any discretionary pay that may have been awarded. This process is referred to as a gender inclusive job evaluation.

Prevention

- Difficulties in terms of valuing the contributions of different jobs and employees can be addressed in large part through job design, clearly defining the expectations and duties of particular jobs and their corresponding value.
- The best method of preventing unequal pay is prevention rather than reaction. This may involve implementing frameworks to ensure fair valuation and pay, starting from the point of employee acquisition, as well as implementing a method for employees to be able to report any suspicions of unequal pay.
- Broader pay transparency is recommended, as this will not only very quickly bring any instances of unequal pay to light, but also lend itself to increased accountability in reducing the gender pay gap. However, this by itself will not automatically or completely close the gender pay gap, which also has structural drivers such as occupational and industrial segregation, and time spent out of the workforce to engage in unpaid caring.²⁰

²⁰ She's Price(d)less: The economics of the gender pay gap | WGEA



The bottom line

Ensuring the legal obligation of equal pay is met is an essential starting point of any efforts to work towards gender equality and must be done by all organisations regardless of their differing situations and objectives.

This is a quickly remediable issue which can provide a solid foundation of equity and transparency for pursuing broader gender equity goals.

Useful resources

[The Australian Human Rights Commission | Equal Pay Handbook \(with instructions for identifying instances of unequal pay\)](#)



14

Undertake a gender impact assessment (GIA) of your remuneration policy

A remuneration strategy sets out an organisation's approach to compensating its staff, while remuneration policy generally outlines how remuneration processes should be administered.

Good remuneration strategy and policy align closely with broader business strategy and cover components of remuneration such as:

- fair compensation
- job roles
- performance
- bonuses and other discretionary payments
- benefits and perks, and any other forms of compensation.

Critically examining your remuneration framework, and looking for potential gendered outcomes, will ensure that the design of the framework is not exacerbating gender inequality.



How does it work?

Gender bias can creep into the remuneration framework in several ways. A good way to perform an impact assessment might be to critically analyse the points of the employee lifecycle at which remuneration is discussed, to determine if there are any differences in the ways women and men will be affected.

The points of the employee lifecycle may include:

Salary setting during job design

- Evidence indicates that gender bias can and does creep into role design. Gender stereotypes can subconsciously influence the job's design, reinforcing expectations about who can/should do the role, and leading to inequitable remuneration outcomes

Inclusion of salary and benefits in job advertisements

- Even the way a role is advertised can influence gendered outcomes. Research indicates women are more reluctant than men to negotiate their salary²¹ and logic follows that they may be less likely to apply for a job if the salary is not advertised

Negotiation of salary on commencement

- In addition to women being less inclined to negotiate their salary, research also indicates that, even when women do negotiate, they are less successful than men at securing a high salary. This is attributed to unconscious gender biases²²

Salary progression and/or bonus decision making as part of the performance evaluation process

Gender bias has been found to creep into performance evaluation when subjective decision making is influenced by an employee's gender. This can be because evaluators hold stereotypical beliefs about the capabilities of men and women or unconsciously penalise employees who violate gendered norms. For example, there is evidence that people (including women) are biased against women who come across as assertive. Additionally, research indicates that men and women tend to receive different feedback, in turn leading to different employment and remuneration outcomes.²³ (see section review performance evaluation process for bias)

Uptake and/or continued use of benefits

- Employee benefits can be an effective attraction or retention lever. However, they can also inadvertently work to exacerbate gender inequality if they are not serving the diverse needs of the entire workforce. For example, providing stock options to employees is an attractive compensation option for many companies. But women may be disadvantaged by vesting schedules, which are often tied to employee years of service, because women are statistically more likely to take time away from the workforce to engage in caring. Additionally, if an organisation already has a significant gender pay gap, men may have more purchasing power and be in a better position than women to purchase stock. This would also contribute to the lifetime earnings gap.

Once you have performed an impact assessment of your remuneration framework, you will need to devise a plan to mitigate identified unequal outcomes for women and men. The results of your impact analysis should feed into your broader gender equality action planning.

²¹ [Nice Girls Don't Ask | Harvard Business Review](#)

²² [Gender and negotiation in the workplace | WGEA](#)

²³ [Gender equitable recruitment and promotion | WGEA](#)



Practitioner insights

- Not all monetary discrepancies can be attributed to remuneration policy. While it is a significant contributor, it is not a catch-all that, by itself, can guarantee equality in remuneration.
- Workforce gender composition is likely to be a more entrenched driver of your gender pay gap. While this assessment and resulting action can have a considerable effect, be prepared to take further action to address other structural factors at play.
- The assessment may reveal the need to scale down the benefits and discretionary payments made to some employees. Doing so can be difficult and anger these employees, so clear respectful communication is critical when making any changes.
- Remain aware that remuneration policy is not just a matter of setting a salary once. The different stages of the employee lifecycle, and factors that affect it, all need to be kept in mind, and thoughtful consideration needs to be given to possible improvements to all these components.
- Gaps in remuneration tend to be exacerbated over time as workers become more experienced, many women take breaks from the workforce, and the gender composition of workers (both overall and among higher-level staff) continues to worsen in cohorts of higher ages. Consider the causes of this trend and what actions can be incorporated into your remuneration policies to lessen the extent of this.

The bottom line

Employees need to feel they have an equal opportunity to be compensated fairly. Evidence of inequality in remuneration processes clearly signals issues with gender equality and undermines employee confidence and satisfaction.

Taking observable action to correct this is an opportunity to make great strides in both reputation and practice in the space of gender equality.

Useful resources

[Including gender: An APS guide to Gender Impact Assessment | PM&C](#)

[Gender pay equity | Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

[Employer Gender Pay Gap Technical Guide | WGEA](#)



15

Embed gender pay gap metrics into manager performance frameworks

A key performance indicator (KPI) is a measurable value that indicates how an organisation, team or individual is performing against an objective.

In the context of gender equality, KPIs can be useful for monitoring the performance of key decision makers and holding them accountable for the success of certain objectives, such as the narrowing of the gender pay gap or gender equitable uptake of flexible working. KPIs are generally quantifiable and actionable, with clear timelines attached to them.

Embedding gender pay gap and workplace flexibility outcomes into the KPIs for top decision makers is a mechanism for keeping an organisation accountable for gender equality outcomes, while also incentivising active individual efforts to make progress on gender equality. Research from the Bankwest Economic Centre and WGEA indicates that, when key decision makers are more engaged with gender equality, pay equity outcomes are better.²⁴

²⁴ WGEA Gender Equity Insights 2020: Delivering the Business Outcomes | BCEC



How does it work

KPIs are generally set at the beginning of a performance cycle. Performance expectations will be set and measured against a baseline recorded at the beginning of the cycle.

There should be several points throughout the cycle to monitor progress against KPIs and this may involve the collation and analysis of relevant data (for example, pay gap data).

At the end of the cycle, the senior manager or executive will have their performance evaluated against the KPIs and this may influence performance-based rewards, incentives or recognition.

The efforts of individuals leading the way as champions of gender equality also gain additional visibility, which should inspire further efforts from other staff.

Practitioner insights

Gender pay gap KPIs:

Options for designing KPIs to close gender pay gaps include:

- a numeric reduction target for the organisation's level gender pay gap over a defined period
- a numeric reduction target for gender pay gaps at specific levels of the organisational hierarchy (for example, senior management)
- achievement against a gender composition target at a strategic level of the organisation that would contribute to narrowing of the gender pay gap (for example, an increase in the number of female Key Management Personnel)
- achievement against a gender composition target for gender balance within one or more pay quartiles.

Gender pay gap metrics may be influenced by external factors such as the job market, which are hard to control. Progress in reducing the gender pay gap can take time. KPIs should be realistic and accommodating for these uncontrollable variables.

Tying incentives to specific metrics can lead to a disproportionate focus on these gender equality indicators for personal gain, rather than a more substantial genuine effort to create gender equal workplace experiences. Using a range of metrics as KPIs, and discouraging actions that only serve to skew numbers, may be necessary.



The bottom line

Shifting perceptions to make gender equality as crucial as any other organisational objective can be transformative, and this action is an excellent starting point for doing so.

Providing clear incentives to actively work to progress gender equality will have an immediately noticeable effect, as well as developing good organisational habits and establishing gender equality outcomes as an innate area of focus in future.

Useful resources:

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 gender equality indicators | WGEA](#)

[Gender pay gap analysis guide | WGEA](#)



16

Undertake a gender inclusive job evaluation

A gender-inclusive job evaluation compares roles and job capabilities to determine whether two or more roles are of equal or comparable value, and if they are being equitably remunerated. Applying a gendered lens to the analysis highlights differences in the relative value of male-concentrated and female-concentrated roles at the same level.



How does it work?

There is a three-step process involved with conducting a gender inclusive job evaluation:

Get Ready

- Plan the project
- Select and train participants
- Select the evaluation scheme
- Select the benchmark sample
- Collect the job information

Evaluate jobs

- Analyse and evaluate the jobs
- Monitor and check the evaluation
- Hold space for appeals

Grading

- Undertake grading

The process of evaluating and classifying two or more roles involves both mapping the work undertaken and the skills and capabilities required to complete the tasks. A direct comparison of those skills and capabilities is then made to determine whether the value of the work is equal or comparable. That is done by looking at things such as expertise, accountability, complexity and interpersonal skills required for the role.

As this process can involve judgement, it is often undertaken by a panel rather than an individual. Special attention is paid to how roles that are often performed by women compare against roles often performed by men.

One of the consequences of historically entrenched gender bias is that jobs performed by women are undervalued, even when they require a similar level of skill as male-concentrated roles. This entrenched bias can be traced back to when it was legal to pay women less for doing the same work because of their gender.

Undertaking this process will enable you to identify when this is influencing your pay grades so that you can remediate any such instances.



Practitioner insights

- Longstanding industrial segregation and barriers to women's entry into various roles and professions can inhibit the effectiveness of this action, at least initially. Similarly, the historical undervaluation of female-dominated jobs and tasks can cause inertia, leading evaluators to hesitate to significantly reconsider the value they associate with these roles.
- Participants in the evaluation scheme may also be prone to being influenced by existing biases and socialised norms, or simply naturally opt for a 'risk minimisation' focus.
- This process may have adverse effects regarding the organisation's engagement with the labour market. In some cases, a fairer evaluation of roles can be tremendously beneficial in attracting desirable talent. But if the perceived relative value of other roles is diminished, the organisation may struggle to attract candidates for these roles.

This can become a regular process for an organisation, and implemented in tandem with careful design of new roles to ensure that fair valuations and expectations are consistent throughout an organisation.

The issues it targets generally stem from culture and history that go far beyond any one workplace, which is simultaneously daunting and an exciting opportunity to be at the forefront of gender equality action. The competitive benefits of taking this action should make other organisations, especially direct competitors, take notice and follow suit, leading to a compounding positive effect.

The bottom line

Gender inclusive job evaluation can address deeply entrenched sources of inequality while providing benefits for an organisation. It can:

- minimise risk. Gender equity in job classification and grading is closely linked to equal pay. Undertaking this process can be used to demonstrate compliance with Australian laws on equal remuneration and sex discrimination
- position the organisation as an employer of choice
- promote a culture of fairness and transparency
- enhance effective use of labour through deeper understanding of the internal labour pool
- support greater corporate accountability for equitable remuneration
- reduce exposure to employee dissatisfaction and complaints about grading, progression and remuneration.

Useful resources

[International Labour Office | Gender-Neutral Job Evaluation For Equal Pay: A Step-by-Step Guide](#)

[New Zealand Department of Labour | Gender Bias in Job Evaluation: A Resource Collection](#)



17

Develop and deploy a universal, gender informed parental leave policy and return-to-work program

In Australia, many organisations are moving towards gender-neutral parental leave policies.

Organisations are offering equal parental leave for all parents and recognising that old distinctions between 'primary' and 'secondary' carers are less relevant in modern society. These distinctions can perpetuate gendered norms about who 'should' take time away from work to care. A neutral policy recognises the equally important role of both parents in caregiving.

Men continue to be underrepresented among employees who take extended leave to care for a new child in the family.²⁵ This results in women continuing to undertake most of the caring, which has very real and compounding impacts on their careers and long-term economic security.

Modelling indicates that one of the three key drivers of the gender pay gap is career disruption due to caring.²⁶ One of the best ways to counter this, and to more evenly distribute caring, is to directly support men to take on more of it. However, in part because of the gender pay gap and the statistical likelihood that fathers will be the higher income earner in a heterosexual couple, men are less likely to take extended leave. This can be countered by offering all new parents the same access to fully paid leave.

²⁵ Parental leave | WGEA

²⁶ She's Price(d)less: The economics of the gender pay gap | WGEA



Universal Parental Leave

How does it work?

Parental leave policies are designed to support and protect working parents around the time of childbirth or adoption of a child and when children are young.

The availability of paid parental leave for each parent fosters a more equal division of unpaid care and paid work, improving the family work-life balance. A strong return-to-work program will support working parents or carers during the transition period as they return to work from extended leave.

Practitioner insights

The process for implementing a gender-neutral policy may involve:

1. Reviewing the existing policy to identify any potential barriers to equal uptake by all new parents or carers. Beyond primary and secondary distinctions, look for other potentially gendered barriers such as eligibility criteria, duration of leave and superannuation payments.
2. Amending the existing policy or developing a new policy with clear objectives for equal access and uptake of parental leave. Partner the policy with a strong return-to-work program for employees returning from parental leave.
3. Communicating the policy broadly across the organisation.
4. Training line managers to understand the policy and supporting employees to understand their entitlements.

This policy benefits both parents, improving their work/life balance and allowing for a greater unimpeded focus on caring for new children.

The workplace also benefits, as it instantly becomes a more attractive place to work and can expect to see improved retention rates.

Furthermore, by normalising a more equal distribution of care and challenging outdated gender roles within families, the policy promotes gender equality within the workplace and beyond.

Return to work program

A return-to-work program is a structured approach to reintegrating an employee that has been on extended leave back into work. Return to work programs aim to guide employees through a smoother transition back into the workforce, supporting them to resume their job effectively and navigate any changes or challenges that may arise.

Evidence indicates that employees are more likely to leave an organisation after periods of extended leave, such as parental leave. Extended leave can signpost large life transitions for employees and providing the right support to facilitate employees returning in a controlled way that considers their desires and requirements can be a good way to retain talent at a critical juncture.

How does it work?

The process for implementing a return-to-work program may involve the following:

1. Ensuring that there is a supporting policy in place outlining things like the eligibility criteria, duration of the program, the kinds of support given, access to flexible working arrangements and any procedures associated with requesting and managing the transition back into work
2. Communicating the program broadly across the organisation
3. Training line managers to understand the requirements of the program and their role in supporting employees. This may require individualised plans for each participating employee which may be designed in conversation with the employee, their manager and HR. Managers should also be trained to monitor performance with the transition in mind.



Practitioner insights

- Even when employees are allowed to take their leave entitlement and/or access return to work programs, there may be subtle barriers to doing so, including pressures from coworkers or managers, which should be monitored and addressed
- Ensure that both initiatives comply with relevant legislation and that employee privacy is respected
- Employees returning to work after extended leave may require additional support from HR or management and adjustments may need to be made.
- Even with these policies in place, stigmas and embedded gender expectations can also serve as barriers to equal uptake of leave and should be addressed with actions. One example is implementing an opt-out approach to parental leave
- As well as being gendered, conceptions of parental leave are often heteronormative, with distinguished maternal and paternal figures and inadequate consideration of same-sex couples. By de-gendering parental roles, this policy presents a chance to address this, and take another significant stride as an organisation towards inclusion
- Return-to-work programs are a prime opportunity to encourage flexible working arrangements and continue working towards normalising them; this action can therefore work well in tandem with others focused on flexibility.

Bottom line:

Partnered together, a strong universal parental leave policy and return to work program can be a powerful retention lever.

They can work to overcome the issue of childbirth and caring responsibilities imposing ceilings on career progression and work to resolve the unequal and gendered distribution of caring responsibilities.

Useful resources

WGEA resource: [Gender equitable parental leave](#)



18

Initiate manager training that includes applying a gender lens to caregiving and flexibility

Managers, like all people, have their own biases, and some will have less concern or experience with responsibilities such as caregiving.

Applying a gender lens and training managers will at least somewhat address biases such as these and will increase organisational consistency in properly treating employees who have caring responsibilities.

Adopting a gender lens is necessary because the effects of caregiving responsibilities and requiring flexibility at work are gendered. Caregiving responsibilities are disproportionately assumed by women and significantly contribute to differences between genders in employee experiences.

Understanding how to support women in these situations, as well as pushing for a more gender equal uptake of caring and flexible working, is a necessary first step to equalising these experiences.

Training for managers may involve providing them with the knowledge, skills and resources to cater their approach towards employees with caregiving responsibilities outside of work. A component of this should also be to encourage gender-equitable share of care. For example, training might involve encouraging men to take extended parental leave when a new child enters the family.



How does it work?

A training program for managers may entail some or all the following:

- Information about the inequitable distribution of care and the importance of supporting men to engage in caring
- resources to understand the many different caring commitments that employees may have
- knowledge about the process of writing an individualised return-to-work plan (see section on **gender neutral parental leave and return to work**)
- information about the benefits of working flexibly and how it can be used to support caring, empowering managers to advocate for it throughout an organisation
- strategies for discussing both formal and informal flexible working with employees
- strategies to support employees with time management and prioritisation
- strategies to promote open communication
- resources and strategies to help managers to promote stress management and wellbeing
- familiarisation with relevant flexible working policies
- familiarisation with support services.

The aim should be improved manager-employee relationships throughout the organisation and a greater sense of being valued among employees.

The organisation's retention rate should improve consequently, along with productivity levels and employee wellbeing. This action also serves to foster a supportive, enjoyable organisational culture with a more gender equitable approach to employee experiences and perceptions of caregiving.

Practitioner insights

- Some employees may not want to disclose their caring commitments, or only feel comfortable doing so to a limited extent. Sensitivity, confidentiality and adhering to employees' comfort levels are all important.
- Employees without caregiving commitments may perceive that special treatment is being given to those employees who do have such responsibilities. Be prepared for any backlash and to explain that this action is about equality rather than preferentiality.
- The nature and demands of caring responsibilities can vary greatly between cultures, families and individuals, so some resources and typical policies will be inappropriate in certain cases. This is another instance where an intersectional²⁷ lens is necessary in deciding on the best action to take (see page 27 for an outline of what this involves).
- There may be gaps in the extent to which different managers embrace the outcomes of this training, which should be monitored to ensure this action is effective.
- Applying similar steps throughout the ranks of senior management also allows managers themselves to benefit in the same way as other employees
- Encourage senior leaders and managers working part-time, flexibly or in job-share arrangements to be public about their working arrangements and to bring their personal experience to their interaction with employees.
- In the longer term, as this becomes a more normalised aspect of managers' roles, flexible work will become further embedded and adopted throughout an organisation.

²⁷ Intersectionality is an analytical framework concerned with the different characteristics of individuals' identities (e.g. gender, sexuality, race, disability, class etc.) and how these characteristics intersect to create unique experiences and forms of disadvantage or discrimination.



The bottom line

Implementation of this initiative will mostly fall to line managers who will set the tone for flexible working culture and influence working behaviours throughout it.

Training can be an important component of making sure that line managers feel confident and comfortable to encourage their employees to work flexibly. It also provides opportunity to ensure that flexible working policy and strategy is applied consistently across an organisation.

Useful resources

[Flexible work | WGEA](#)

[Guidance for managers | Department of Employment and Workplace Relations](#)

[Carers in the workplace | Carers Australia](#)



19

Implement an all-roles flex policy for all positions

Implementation Tip

Include measurement and accountability protocols for applications AND approvals in your implementation plan.

Understanding who applies for flexible work arrangements, who approves them and the nature of arrangements, across staff levels and genders, reflects how both gender and ideal worker norms interact across the employee lifecycle.

Analysing applications as well as approvals for flexible work arrangements can also highlight how employees perceive organisational attitudes towards flexibility and their trust in such arrangements being a legitimate and supported part of the broader employee experience across levels and roles, rather than being strictly gendered.



‘All roles flex’ is a policy establishing an organisational commitment to enabling and supporting flexible working practices for all employees, regardless of their position. It demonstrates an organisation’s commitment to employee wellbeing and develops a culture that values diversity through supporting different ways of working.

This action can accelerate workplace gender equality goals by attracting a broader range of potential candidates to the organisation. It strengthens the existing talent pool for progression and promotion of women, who might have self-selected out of consideration because of a need or preference for alternative work arrangements. It could include promotion of part-time and job-share positions, remote and hybrid work, compressed working hours or similar. Sydney University catalogues a range of all roles flex case studies in diverse real-world contexts.²⁸

How does it work?

Mainstreaming flexibility is routinely encapsulated in policy and the catch phrase ‘all roles are flex’. This is often used by employers to enhance attraction and retention outcomes.

Mainstreaming flexibility improves gender equality and narrows gender pay gaps in two ways – both relating to workforce composition:

- It can broaden candidate pools by reducing self-selection out of consideration by potential applicants who require (or desire) alternative work arrangements to the 5-day, full-time, in-office work week.
- It can also act as an effective retention and engagement strategy for existing employees by valuing and supporting their diversity and ways of working across the employee lifecycle and in ways that break down gender and ideal worker norms.

Mainstreaming flexibility has been associated with improved organisational productivity, an enhanced ability to attract and retain employees, improved employee well-being, an increased proportion of women in leadership and future-proofing of the workplace.²⁹

It enhances the employer value proposition by recognising the diverse needs of employees and understanding that their performance is enhanced when they work in ways that are meaningful to them.

Implementing an all-roles flex policy signals a recognition of employees and their contribution, and an understanding of their needs, by supporting their work-life balance. By clearly conveying an understanding of employee needs for work-life balance, this action creates optimal conditions for high performance while improving retention rates. Importantly, this approach does not just apply to ‘working from home’ but to the full range of flexible work arrangements.

²⁸ [Busting flexible work myths: why not to tie workers to their desks | The University of Sydney](#)

²⁹ [Flexible work post-COVID | WGEA](#)



Practitioner insights

The feasibility of working from home, flexible hours and other components of flexible working can vary greatly between industries and the nature of employees' roles. In instances where a full suite of flexible working options cannot be offered, managers need to pursue creative solutions and remain receptive of employee needs and suggestions to demonstrate a commitment to flexibility.

Providing employees with the opportunity to work flexibly **does not guarantee** that they will do so, even if they desire to. Workplace culture, the policy being poorly promoted or inaccessible (for example, due to a rigorous application process), or other factors, can complicate up-take. These must be monitored and addressed for this action to serve its intended purpose.

Lingering stigmas and outdated perceptions of flexible working may lead employees to see it as a trade-off, i.e. coming at the cost of progression or respect in the workplace. This needs to be dispelled, requiring clear messaging about the viability of flexible working at all staff levels, which is to be accompanied by action to ensure this is the case.

Employee experience data can provide additional information to signal where 'all roles flex' could really amplify attraction and retention, with follow-on effects on gender pay gaps. Existing patterns of flexible work arrangements, exit data and return to work from parental leave can signal unmet need and the areas where gender composition can be rebalanced through mainstreaming flexibility to attract more women into the pool.

- To strengthen the application of 'all roles flex', ensure selection decisions are made prior to discussions with any new candidates on their flexibility intentions or needs. This keeps it separate to selection and is a true test of the 'all roles flex' policy
- To embed flexibility as the norm, integrate flexible work metrics into performance review processes for managers
- Establish a default approval policy where exceptions (unsupported applications) are automatically subject to an independent review. This removes the onus on the applicant to lodge an appeal against their line manager and reduces backlash.

The bottom line

When applied to senior level positions, for example, explicitly stating that a role can be undertaken part-time or in a job-share situation can have a profound effect on the gender balance of a candidate pool and, by extension, your gender composition, especially when your selection processes are degendered, fair and equitable.

Advertising roles as flexible can help to present an organisation as open to new ways of working, beyond antiquated notions of full-time presenteeism. This may open roles up to a more diverse candidate pool which can in turn help to address compositional imbalances and gender pay gaps. For example, advertising new roles or promotions as part-time or job-share opportunities can increase applications from women for senior leadership roles and build deeper candidate pools.

Selecting the best person for the job is linked to ensuring talented, high-potential candidates have not self-selected out of the process to begin with, based on the need for flexible work arrangements.

Useful resources

[Busting flexible work myths: why not to tie workers to their desks | The University of Sydney](#)





20

Embed flexibility metrics in leadership Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

When flexible work metrics are embedded in leadership performance plans it reflects an employer's commitment to workplace flexibility. It sets the expectation that people leaders understand and are committed to workplace gender equality goals while holding leadership accountable for managing flexible work.

This is particularly powerful as a leadership tool when KPIs are connected to gender relevant data points (for example, when performance data shows little or no change in the progress, pay and promotion of those on flexible work arrangements or where there is no gender balance in the uptake of flexible work arrangements).



How does it work?

This approach aligns organisational goals with employee needs by strategically integrating specific measures related to flexible working into performance criteria for leaders. This holds leaders accountable for promotion and normalising flexibility within the workplace.

Suggested metrics include:

- use of flexible work arrangements (broken down by gender and type of arrangement)
- employee satisfaction scores related to work-life flexibility
- productivity measures for teams with flexible schedules
- absenteeism rates (comparing those working flexibly with overall rates)
- exit interview assessments – how often the articulated reason for leaving is related to lack of work-life balance

The chosen KPIs should be monitored regularly and incorporated into performance evaluations, with opportunities to review existing efforts to achieve them and how this can be improved. Managers' bonuses and other incentives can be tied to the achievement of targets or goals to add further incentive.

actitioner insights

- Supporting leadership to adopt flexible working arrangements themselves is a solid next step in signalling an organisational commitment to flexibility and making employees feel more comfortable and supported in doing so
- Various adjustments will be needed to working practices to support a large-scale transition to flexible work, ensuring that all aspects of organisational activity can function with a flexible workforce. The actions listed below are recommended for achieving this, if they are applicable to your workplace
- Teams need to be supported to properly implement flexible working – this could involve training/workshops, review of policies, special technology or introducing support services. In some cases, management and team members negotiating informal arrangements may also be necessary
- Consistency is important across the organisation. Those employees who don't have access to flexible arrangements must be provided with transparent reasoning, and efforts must be made to rectify this to the greatest extent possible
- KPIs may need to be adjusted over time. A periodic (for example, annual) review of progress is an opportunity to make these adjustments as necessary
- Various changes and external factors may affect KPIs, and staff cannot be made to adopt flexible working practices, limiting the control that managers have over uptake rates.



The bottom line

This approach can reform the culture of an organisation and be instrumental in the widespread acceptance and normalisation of flexibility. As drivers of change and organisational norms, managers adopting responsibility for monitoring flexible working can be transformative.

Employees who feel able and encouraged to incorporate flexibility into their working patterns will be more satisfied at work, and flexible working arrangements will become far less gendered, and as such, a lesser driver of inequality.

Useful resources

[Flexible work](#) | [WGEA Flexible working arrangements](#) | [Fair Work Ombudsman](#)



A photograph of a woman with red hair holding a baby. The woman is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The baby is looking off to the side. The image is partially obscured by a yellow overlay on the right side of the page.

21

Embed an opt-out approach to parental leave for all parents

In behavioural economics, an opt-out situation is where a person is automatically enrolled or signed up for a policy or program. To withdraw their participation, they must take steps to opt-out. Evidence indicates that people are more likely to participate in something if they do not have to actively choose to do so.

In the context of parental leave, an opt-out approach would assume that, when an employee informs their employer they are going to welcome a new child into their life, they will take their full leave entitlement. This will usually involve a conversation where the employee tells their manager that they are assuming caring responsibilities for a new child and the manager then informs them of their full leave entitlement.

With an opt-out approach, the manager does not ask 'How much leave are you taking?', because the assumption is that the full entitlement will be taken. If the employee does not want to take their full entitlement, they must set up a meeting with their manager to discuss and make a different arrangement. Rather than the onus being on an employee to speak to a manager and make a leave request, an opt-out policy reverses this dynamic. This applies to both primary and secondary carers' leave, as well as universal carers' leave.

While this approach is evidence based and well applied in many other circumstances, it could be considered an experimental approach in the context of parental leave.



How does it work?

By removing the step of negotiating leave, the opt-out approach is intended to overcome some of the common obstacles to workers, particularly men, to taking parental leave. These obstacles include social pressures, concerns about adverse effects on career progression and organisational norms and cultures. In Australia, for example, data indicates that men are not taking their full parental leave entitlements.³⁰

The overall objective of an opt-out approach is to make taking parental leave a less gendered action, and therefore address the gendered discrepancies in terms of who takes it and how it affects career prospects, both of which contribute significantly to the gender pay gap.

It is strongly recommended that parental leave is offered at full pay. It is theorised that one of the reasons men under use government-funded leave is that it is offered at the minimum wage. Because of the gender pay gap, men are statistically more likely to be the higher earner in a heterosexual couple and therefore less likely to take their full leave entitlement if it means a loss of income for their family.³¹

Practitioner insights

The opt-out concept can be applied to a more thorough offering of parental leave, for example, providing leave in cases of adoption and long-term foster care, stillbirth or loss of pregnancy. A great deal of sensitivity must be applied in all scenarios.

- Upon adopting this policy, regular analysis should be conducted about the outcomes of employees who use their parental leave entitlements. This can include comparison of how many employees (and of which genders) do so compared to prior levels, and how those employees fare upon returning to work, including their rate of progression compared to those who do not take parental leave. This can provide opportunities for further policy refinements to continue working towards removing any detrimental consequences of taking parental leave
- There may be valid reasons for an employee to not want to take their full leave entitlement. For example, if your organisation does not offer parental leave at full pay, there is financial disincentive for employees to be on extended leave
- There may be other reasons an employee might not want to take their full entitlement. The action should not work to take the choice away from employees but normalise taking leave by making it the default option.

³⁰ [Designing and supporting gender equitable parental leave | WGEA](#)

³¹ [Why don't more dads take parental leave? The answer is in their heads - ABC News](#)



The bottom line

The gendered nature of parental leave is a longstanding issue that remains one of the principal contributors to gender inequality. Socialised and cultural beliefs surrounding childcare make it difficult to fix directly through actions.

This action can serve as a step towards breaking down these barriers and ensuring that all employees feel as supported and comfortable as possible while managing work and parental responsibilities.

Useful resources

[Towards gender balanced parental leave | WGEA](#)





22

Pay superannuation on paid and unpaid parental leave

In Australia, women are more likely than men to work part-time, take extended time off for caring purposes, and work in lower-paid roles and industries. As well as their more immediate impact on the gender pay gap, all these factors compound over a career and result in what is known as the gender superannuation gap. Of these, the leading factor is time out of the workforce caring for young children.³² This means women are retiring with significantly less superannuation and are at greater risk of ending up living with financial insecurity or even in poverty.

WGEA data indicates that two-thirds of employers offer employer funded parental leave. Of those employers, 85% pay superannuation to their employees while they are on paid leave. However, it is less common for employers to pay superannuation while employees are on periods of unpaid leave.³³

According to WGEA data, the average amount of paid parental leave offered to primary carers is 12 weeks. However, a survey of mothers found that, on average, they desired to return to work when a child was between 9 and 12 months old.³⁴

This leaves a significant unpaid gap that can be difficult to manage, in many cases with the added disadvantage of missed superannuation.

³² [Addressing the gender superannuation gap | KPMG Australia](#)

³³ [2022-23 Gender Equality Scorecard | WGEA](#)

³⁴ [Whitehouse, G., Hosking, A., & Baird, M. \(2007\). *Investigating the optimal duration of maternity leave: Evidence from the Parental Leave in Australia Survey \(LSAC Wave 1.5\)*. Paper presented at the *Growing Up in Australia: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children 2007 Research Conference*, Melbourne, 3-4 December.](#)



How does it work?

An effective way to counter this has been for employers to voluntarily make superannuation payments, covering the period of paid and unpaid leave after an employee takes on caring responsibilities for a new child. Embedding this into an organisational parental leave policy ensures it is done consistently.

According to a survey of members of one of Australia's leading superannuation schemes with a predominantly female membership base, 3 out of 5 members who had taken parental leave were concerned about the impact it would have on their financial security in retirement.³⁵

Paying superannuation on both paid and unpaid parental leave can be a good lever for employee wellbeing and staff retention.

An organisation that pays superannuation on parental leave demonstrates that it cares about gender equality and the long-term financial wellbeing of its employees.

In a tight job market, this can also be an attraction lever for talented prospective employees who may be considering welcoming a new child into their family at some point in the future.

Practitioner insights

- It is best practice to combine this with other actions that are designed to maximise the support offered by leave policies.
- With flexibility becoming more normalised, and many employers offering generous parental leave provisions, this action is an excellent opportunity to continue to distinguish your organisation as an attractive employer that cares about the wellbeing of its staff.
- The most likely source of resistance or pushback against this policy is concern about the associated cost. This of course presents a substantial barrier to implementation, so ensure the logic underpinning this action is clear when presenting it as an option.

³⁵ HESTA member views on super & Parental Leave | HESTA



The bottom line

While the gender pay gap, which is expressed in terms of annual income, is of course immediately harmful, the inequality it causes only compounds over time while it is sustained. Superannuation is one key area in which gender inequality is particularly exacerbated.

This makes relevant action a crucial step in the long-term efforts to achieve gender equality in financial security, while also presenting more immediate benefits in terms of worker wellbeing and satisfaction, organisational attraction and further working towards encouraging employees of all genders to use their parental leave entitlements.

Useful resources

[Parental leave | WGEA](#)





23

Implement processes to support effective referrals for employees experiencing or supporting victims of domestic violence

Family and domestic violence is a workplace issue.

Every year, Australians from all demographics experience family and domestic violence, impacting their performance and productivity, mental health and wellbeing, and safety at work. Perpetrators can continue the violence in the workplace via phone calls, emails, texts or stalking. This can put victim-survivors and their colleagues in danger.

Employers can provide important support to employees by implementing processes that support effective referrals for employees impacted by domestic violence.



How does it work?

While employers can directly provide some support services to victim-survivors, and train employees so they can respond appropriately and supportively, in many cases the best practice is to establish relationships with third-party providers and ensure all staff are able to access their services securely and easily.

Practitioner insights

- It is crucial to ensure confidentiality regarding the information of employees accessing these services. This must be a focus throughout all policies concerning domestic violence so victim-survivors feel confident they can access services as needed, without their experiences being disclosed to additional parties without their consent.
 - Victim-survivors have greatly varying reactions and needs in response to domestic violence. For a policy to be trauma-informed, and to make employees more comfortable accessing them, it is imperative that a victim-survivor has complete autonomy over the support(s) that they access. This remains the case even if they would clearly benefit from making use of certain services that they choose to forgo.
 - In the case of relying on third parties for the provision of support services, the inability to directly regulate these providers must be considered. They should be thoroughly assessed in terms of their commitment to confidentiality, treatment of victim-survivors, utility, and existence of any other risks to wellbeing, before committing to them as a provider to which employees are referred.
- Although women are statistically four times more likely than men to be victim-survivors,³⁶ domestic violence is absolutely not an issue exclusive to women. 27% of women and 15% of men have experienced violence or emotional/economic abuse by a cohabiting partner, as reported by the Personal Safety survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.³⁷ This needs to be reflected in the messaging surrounding this action, and employees of all genders need to be actively encouraged to utilise support services available to them. Research by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare also finds non-binary people are statistically most likely to experience domestic violence, as well as a high percentage of transgender respondents;³⁸ policies and messaging need to account for this and take care to facilitate their access to support.
 - People experiencing or supporting victims of domestic violence are not likely to have universal experiences, and support offerings should be developed with this in mind. First Nations people and people with disabilities, for example, are significantly more likely to experience abuse, and the nature of this abuse – and thus the necessary support – may be unique.

³⁶ Domestic and Family Violence statistics | Mission Australia

³⁷ Personal Safety, Australia, 2021-22 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)

³⁸ LGBTQIA+ people - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)



The bottom line

Any employee experiencing domestic violence should be made to feel as safe as possible in the workplace and should have access to as many sources of support as possible. Making the workplace a safe and supportive area and establishing a series of support services that employees can be referred to, demonstrates crucial progress as well as a deep level of care for employee safety and gender equality.

Gender inequality and domestic violence are deeply interrelated. A social environment of inequality and power imbalance is entrenched by all interactions and, in turn, affects countless aspects of life. Any form of inequality, including within the workplace, can ultimately enable and perpetuate violence. Gender pay gaps, for example, create financial imbalances within relationships, inherently causing a power imbalance, which can expedite violence, be it physical, emotional or otherwise.

It is crucial to effectively respond to incidents of domestic violence, but at the same time bear in mind that working towards gender equality is vital to addressing the root causes of violence.

Useful resources

[Family and domestic violence | WGEA](#)

[Support and resources | 1800RESPECT](#)





24

Introduce paid domestic violence leave above what is offered under the National Employment Standards (NES)

Access to paid leave for employees experiencing domestic or family violence is critical to supporting workplace gender equality.

With more than one in four women reporting they have experienced violence, emotional abuse or economic abuse from a cohabiting partner,³⁹ paid leave from work is likely to be both valued and needed in many workplaces.⁴⁰ Best practice policy recommendations now propose a minimum of 10 to 14 days paid leave, with the introduction of 'unlimited' domestic and family violence leave being increasingly considered.

³⁹ Personal Safety, Australia, 2021-22 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)

⁴⁰ Intimate partner violence - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)



How does it work?

Some key features of this initiative include:

- That leave is offered to employees experiencing domestic violence directly, as well as to employees who may be supporting someone experiencing domestic violence.
- This leave should be in addition to legal requirements outlined in the National Employment Standards (NES).
- The leave should be able to be used flexibly, as a continuous block or intermittently, depending on the employee's needs.
- Leave should be offered at full pay and considered continuous service, attracting superannuation and any other regular benefits.
- Any application for paid domestic violence leave should be kept strictly confidential and any information collected about the nature of the leave should be stored privately.
- Employees should be assured of protection against any adverse action for taking domestic violence leave, including protection against termination or demotion.

Practitioner insights

- Employees taking leave, particularly for extended periods, are likely to face questions from coworkers about the reason for their absence. All staff, particularly managers, should be trained to be respectful in these circumstances, and steps should be taken to ensure victim-survivors are never made to disclose their experiences if they do not wish to do so.
- A common example of the above is how domestic violence leave is reflected on a victim-survivor's payslip or similar records. The nature of the leave should be unspecified, both to maintain the privacy of the victim-survivor and prevent risks such as an abusive partner seeing a payslip and finding out the victim-survivor has disclosed their situation.
- Adverse action for taking domestic violence leave may not necessarily be in the form of termination, demotion etc, but can be more subtle. Give employees the opportunity to voice any concerns about how they are treated because of taking domestic violence leave, and ensure that the response is sensitive and protects the employee/s.
- Victim-survivors are often reluctant to disclose their experiences, especially in detail, and being made to do so unwittingly is likely to further harm their emotional wellbeing while in a vulnerable position. Therefore, this leave should be proactively offered, along with other domestic violence supports, and made as accessible as possible so that emotional distress and reliving trauma is not a prerequisite for accessing leave entitlements.
- While it can be profoundly impactful, offering only a one-off period of leave is not best practice, regardless of its duration. Experiences of domestic violence can be prolonged and can lead to longer-lasting significant changes to living circumstances, as well as severe trauma. This is all reason to offer a range of support services, flexible working arrangements and the ability to take domestic violence leave again after returning to the workplace, if necessary, making this action a longer-term source of critical support for victim-survivors.



The bottom line

Going beyond your obligations in supporting survivor-victims of domestic or family violence is a clear sign an organisation values its employees and cares about their wellbeing.

This is a good way to balance acting ethically and bolstering your organisation's reputation, and the gendered nature of experienced rates of domestic violence makes this a significant component of gender equality efforts.

Useful resources

[Family and domestic violence | WGEA](#)

[Family violence leave and workplace supports | Monash University](#)





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Establish an employee consultative committee (a diversity committee or an employee representative group/network) and consult with employees

Consultative committees, such as diversity committees or employee representative groups, enable organisations to build diversity and inclusion into the culture of the workplace. They can identify employee issues and improve company culture.

Drawing on employee experiences and insights in relation to gender equality can be a powerful way to inform interventions, reality test ideas and innovations, and plan effective implementation, especially in frontline areas of operation.

The size of your committee will depend on the size and nature of your organisation. Information about how to consult with employees and establish a committee is available on the WGEA website.



How does it work?

The method of appointing the relevant body can vary depending on the most pressing organisational need. It may involve staff voting on its members if it is to be comprised of employees, or it may be direct appointments in response to specific needs (for example, seeking experts in diversity or meeting a gender composition target). The committee can then have direct contact with employees throughout the organisation, and with management, to ensure that relevant concerns are heard and can be acted on. This may be in the form of regular meetings (for example, every 3 months) or a feedback mechanism through which the committee can present its views and proposals and work with organisational leaders.

Practitioner insights

- Ensure a range of voices exist within the committee which are representative of different groups and viewpoints from within the organisation. This includes position, characteristics such as ethnicity and opinions on key workplace issues, etc. Direct staff consultation can also provide space for these voices even if they are lacking on the committee itself.
- There is a risk that these committees are purely symbolic, without any organisational sway and with ideas falling on deaf ears. Ensure they hold some sort of authority or that their relationship with management is subject to periodic review so they can be of consequence.
- Concerns and proposals of a committee may clash with organisational objectives or face issues such as resource constraints. This can impede the implementation of any proposals and lead to backlash among executives, making them less likely to consider employees' concerns.
- After establishing a committee, periodically review its composition and level of genuine influence, as well as analysing any actions and changes it may have inspired. Upholding mechanisms for all employees to communicate with the body is vital, including anonymously if they choose to do so, to ensure the committee is truly representative of the workforce. Also continue to seek the input of different advocacy groups to identify and address any blind spots that continue to exist, even within the committee.



The bottom line

Employees like to have their voices heard and feel more supported when they believe they have been listened to. Introducing consultative committees can achieve this while working to overcome issues such as imbalanced boards that tend to skew organisational direction and are prone to blind spots, particularly in relation to gender equality.

This action strengthens culture and employee satisfaction and can inspire innovation, boost engagement and productivity and lead to tangible organisational benefits.

Useful resources

[Employee consultation | WGEA](#)

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 gender equality indicators | WGEA](#)

[Consultation and cooperation in the workplace - Fair Work Ombudsman](#)





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Develop and implement a policy to prevent sex-based harassment, discrimination and bullying with a clear grievance process and statement of intent

As part of providing a safe and respectful workplace for staff, employers are expected to take proactive measures to prevent workplace sexual harassment.

An organisation's policy should contain a statement about how it intends to address and prevent sex-based harassment, discrimination and bullying. The support options (including informal advice) should be regularly promoted to staff, and policies should be consistently applied across the organisation.

Employees will feel more confident about raising incidents of sexual harassment if they have some certainty about how action will be taken. Providing staff with information about how harassment will be addressed supports the legislative requirement of positive duty under the Respect@Work Bill.



How does it work?

Developing this policy is another instance in which consultation, with employees and beyond, can be beneficial, providing insight into what an effective policy should include.

This policy should take a preventive, rather than reactive, approach, but any incidents that arise should also be responded to appropriately, with actions clearly conveying a zero-tolerance message.

Once a policy has been created, it should be widely communicated to staff and made publicly available, not just the policy's existence but the details of what it includes. This should be complemented with staff training, so all employees know their responsibilities and the support available to them. Senior leaders should be particularly committed to enforcing the policy. Support services for any employees experiencing harassment, discrimination and bullying should also be made readily available.

Practitioner insights

- An Australian Human Rights Commission 2022 survey found that one in three Australian workers (and 41% of women) had experienced sexual harassment at work in the last five years, but only 18% of those people made a complaint.⁴¹ This gap between prevalence of incidents and reports must be kept in mind, and efforts must be made to break down the barriers to reporting and making staff feel comfortable doing so.
- As part of this, it is paramount to ensure that any staff reporting any relevant instances are protected. This means upholding their anonymity, making sure they are protected from any adverse consequences (for example, social backlash, direct or indirect punishment, or loss of opportunities) and are well informed about the support available to them. This action works only if staff are confident in the effectiveness and safety of the policy.
- Responding to incidents of harassment, discrimination and/or bullying requires a trauma-informed and intersectional approach. Being trauma informed means remaining aware of the trauma an employee may have experienced and its impacts, supporting the choices of the individual surrounding disclosure etc and prioritising their safety, while remaining sensitive to the ways in which trauma may manifest. This also involves an awareness of the impacts of aspects of identities, such as age, ethnicity, class, sex/gender and disability, in how traumatic events are experienced and are processed and responded to.
- The nature and development of this policy can be informed by a gender pay gap analysis, particularly with a focus on staff turnover and reasons cited for departure, and how this differs between genders, particular business areas, etc.

⁴¹ Time for respect: Fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces | Australian Human Rights Commission



- This action is a crucial step in what can be a long process of cultural realignment, serving as an opportunity to stamp out normalised unacceptable behaviour within the workplace. Beyond the enforcement of the policy, remaining vocal with all employees about positive duty, and prioritising expected adherence to the policy during recruitment, can bolster its effectiveness.
- Collecting and analysing information on the prevalence of sexual harassment can expand insights into prevention. The results should be considered in the context of national surveys, which indicate that the full extent of workplace sexual harassment is not being captured.
- It is crucial to support anyone who reports incidents of sexual harassment following the incident's resolution, with a focus on repair and recovery that includes repairing workplace relationships. This post-resolution period should be treated as a 'safety, wellbeing and/or talent retention issue to be actively managed'.

The bottom line

Safety within the workplace is the foundation upon which all gender equality efforts must be built. Any stated commitment to gender equality is weakened if this is not a significant area of focus.

The aim of this action is to prevent workplace sexual harassment, while also committing to holding perpetrators accountable. Addressing harassment and discrimination goes hand in hand with rectifying composition and pay gaps; all are interrelated and significant components of gender equality action planning.

The results from this action will be vast if it is implemented correctly.

Useful resources

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 Gender Equality Indicators | WGEA](#)

[Using evidence to improve workplace sexual harassment prevention and response | WGEA](#)

[The role of policy on workplace culture | Respect@Work](#)

[Resources on Positive Duty \(humanrights.gov.au\)](#)





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Provide compulsory training to line managers on recognising and addressing workplace sex-based harassment

Workplace sex-based harassment is complex and, beyond those who are directly involved, also impacts other people throughout an organisation. It cannot be viewed as an inevitable issue that can be left unaddressed.

Organisations should provide training to employees who act as first responders, such as line managers and human resource professionals. The training should support first responders to appropriately and safely identify, prevent and manage incidents of sex-based harassment. Where possible, training should incorporate real-life scenarios, case studies or interactive simulations to foster empathetic approaches and bystander action, and help employees recognise and address potential areas of risk.

This action can support your legislative requirement of positive duty to prevent workplace sexual harassment. Further, all employees should be educated about the existence and risks of workplace sex-based harassment and actions that can be taken to prevent it.



How does it work?

Understanding the risks and prevalence of sexual harassment in your workplace, as well as nationwide, requires everyone to be clear on what it is, how to prevent it and what to do if it happens. Respect@Work recommends that training and education:

- are delivered in multiple ways on an ongoing basis
- include a mix of formal and informal learning
- include case studies and context relevant to your organisation
- cover the options for reporting and potential outcomes
- include guidance for bystanders.

It is important to train organisational leaders, people managers, contact officers and HR personnel to respond appropriately to reports of and queries about sexual harassment, so employees feel safe to report. Key concepts include the need to ensure confidentiality and using a trauma-informed, person-centred approach.

Practitioner insights

- There are many instances where managers themselves perpetrate sex-based harassment. Similarly, perpetrators may have rapport with managers that may make a victim-survivor less inclined to report, and/or reduce the likelihood of actions being taken. If managers are left to exclusively regulate themselves, this can go unobserved and unaddressed. Therefore, they cannot be the sole avenue through which reporting and responsive action can happen.
- Training can have adverse effects; for example, unconscious bias training has been found to be detrimental in some cases, as those who undergo it can end up with the false impression that their bias has been addressed, discouraging further self-reflection. Similarly, training around sex-based harassment may cause some managers to see the issue as a 'checked box' and pay it little to no attention. However, managers need to act effectively. To help monitor this, a training policy needs to be thorough, and the organisation's existing approach to sex-based harassment needs to be constantly evaluated.
- Beyond managers, formal bystander training is recommended for all employees, led by instructors with relevant skills and expertise. Awareness raising and education can also be furthered through other means – for example, regular and open conversations in one-on-one meetings, team meetings or with a larger audience.
- As previously mentioned, managers should not be the lone mechanism through which employees can report instances of harassment. Ensure all employees are readily able to access external reporting options and are thoroughly educated about their ability to do so. Examples of such options include the Australian Human Rights Commission, Fair Work Commission, and any relevant anti-discrimination and workplace health and safety bodies within a given state or territory.



The bottom line

Workplace sex-based harassment is very prevalent and cannot be viewed as an inevitable issue that can be left unaddressed, or one that rests with HR or senior leadership. As its occurrence is not confined to one area of organisations, there must be a widespread readiness to address it, meaning managers in all areas of an organisation need to be equipped to do so.

Useful resources

[Where to start | Respect@Work](#)

[Sexual and gender based harassment overview | Safe Work Australia](#)

[The positive duty under the Sex Discrimination Act | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

[Employer guidance on developing policies and strategies for the 6 Gender Equality Indicators | WGEA](#)



Appendix 1

Setting effective targets



Targets are achievable, time-framed objectives which organisations can set and monitor regularly to focus their efforts on improving gender equality outcomes. They are an important monitoring and evaluation component of any gender equality action plan.

There are several steps involved in setting effective targets in conjunction with your gender equality action plan.

- 1. Establish a target setting team:** This might be the same committee or group responsible for establishing your action plan. The team must be well resourced and able to take a data-driven approach to target setting.
- 2. Data assessment:** Good target setting will involve a proper assessment of workplace gender equality data. The most comprehensive way to undertake this assessment is by conducting a gender pay gap analysis. The 'hot spots'⁴² that you identify through this process are likely to directly inform your action planning and target setting.
- 3. Identify goals:** Your action plan should set out the goals you want to achieve but your targets should be a tangible way of measuring and evaluating your progress towards those goals. For example, your action plan may set out to build more pipelines into leadership for women. You may link that goal to metrics that measure the number of women being promoted from non-management into management, or the number of women participating in a formal sponsorship program.
- 4. Specify targets:** Once the goal and correct metrics have been identified, it's time to set targets to work towards. These should be specific and measurable over time, with clear direction about who is accountable for achieving them.
- 5. Evaluate and maintain:** Targets should be monitored at regular intervals. They may need to be reevaluated when progress is not being made as planned. Likewise, when targets are achieved quickly and easily, this may indicate that more challenging targets are needed to drive faster progress.

⁴² 'Hot spots' are data-based indicators of gendered experiences within an organisation that become visible through a pay gap analysis. They may relate to composition, pay, mobility, talent or engagement, within an organisation and tend to be significant drivers of gender pay gaps.



Appendix 2

Prioritising Actions



Use the framework to create a final list of interventions for your gender equality action plan.

Employee feedback

Organisation's business strategy

Interdependencies and connections - could the action address multiple needs or support another action? This can amplify your existing efforts. Many gendered experiences are interrelated – for example, inadequate policies regarding flexible working can limit the career progression of employees with caring responsibilities and cause gender composition gaps at senior levels, therefore exacerbating gender pay gaps – which presents an opportunity to address numerous organisational issues simultaneously. Use organisational strengths.

Existing strengths

It is helpful to build on existing successes, resources, systems and capability. You can draw from what is already working, and use it to deepen engagement, or have an impact on more people across the organisation.

Consider likely barriers

Consider if now is a good time to begin action on a longstanding challenge. Incorporate historical knowledge to guide you on what has worked or what might not have worked. Here, employee consultation can be invaluable.

Next steps

If you have a final list of feasible, fit-for-purpose actions, there are several steps you can take now to progress your plan, depending on your workplace protocols and existing policies and procedures.



Before attending to any actions on your list you should first ensure you are meeting your basic compliance and policy obligations

Compliance

Ensuring you have met the legislative requirements is a critical first step to action planning. For example, correcting instances of like-for-like pay gaps should come first as it is a legal requirement under the Fair Work Act 2009. The new WGEA reporting obligations for employers with 500 or more employees also require compliance with gender equality standards across each of the GEIs.

Beyond gender equality standards

Applying a critical gender lens to all your existing policies is a further step to take before committing to additional actions. Beyond having a policy in place for each of the GEIs, you should also consider the basic standards expected from employees regarding the content of those policy provisions. These provide a solid platform from which you can then advance. Without meeting your compliance obligations and mainstreaming the common standards of employment, advancing gender equality and narrowing your gender pay gap will be significantly more difficult

Need more help selecting your actions? Book into an advisory session or masterclass.

Prioritise

Select and prioritise your action

	List of potential actions
	Assess actions using your employee experience lens
	Assess actions using your organisational strategy
	Assess actions by considering their interdependency and connections
	Assess actions on existing achievements, strengths and momentum
	Assess actions that have far reaching and or historical barriers
	Actions for priority





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