



Supporting gender equity in the workplace

Learnings from the Generating Equality and Respect program

This tool shares insights on supporting gender equity in the workplace. It forms part of a suite of tools developed from the experiences of Monash City Council and Link Health and Community in their journey to create and support gender equity and prevent violence against women as part of the Generating Equality and Respect program.

Drawing from VicHealth's decade of research and activity in preventing violence against women, Generating Equality and Respect was a world-first three-and-a-half-year program bringing together a range of prevention strategies to a single location in Melbourne. The program had a significant focus on supporting gender equity in the workplace. More information about the program can be found on the VicHealth website.

This tool reflects the learnings gained from Monash City Council and Link Health and Community who, as part of Generating Equality and Respect, applied a range of strategies to build gender equity within their own organisation. It not intended as a definitive guide. The tool focuses on three key areas of action:

- building a supportive workplace culture
- building staff capacity to understand and take action to support gender equity
- embedding gender equity into organisational systems.

Parts of the tool can be used as stand-alone resources, or together to guide a whole-of-organisation approach to supporting gender equity.

Definitions

Gender equality – equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society; sometimes referred to as formal equality.

Gender equity – involves fairness and justice in the distribution of resources and responsibilities between men and women; sometimes referred to as substantive equality. It often requires women-specific programs and policies to end existing inequalities.¹

ONLINE RESOURCES

To view the full suite of tools, visit vichealth.vic.gov.au/GEAR-tools



¹ World Health Organization 2010, *Violence prevention: The evidence*, WHO, Geneva.



Build a supportive workplace culture

Building an organisational culture that supports gender equity is critical to creating a gender-equitable workplace. A supportive organisational culture helps to create and sustain an 'authorising environment' for change. A workplace culture that supports gender equity can be seen in organisations that are:

- aware of the importance of gender equality and respectful relationships and their current performance
- ready to talk about gender inequality, gender stereotypes, and violence against women
- open to doing things differently
- committed to taking action to build a fairer workplace.

Creating a supportive workplace culture takes time and requires multiple and mutually reinforcing strategies. Three critical strategies that underpin workplace culture change work are:

- involving workers
- engaging leaders
- involving women and men.

Strategies	Tips and considerations
<p>Involve workers</p>	<p>Worker engagement and participation is critical to building an organisational culture that supports gender equity.</p> <p>Involving workers helps to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overcome resistance • create a critical mass of new thinking and stimulate an appetite for change • generate buy-in and ownership • ensure that strategies are fit for purpose and reflect workforce needs. <p>Aim to engage the hearts and minds of workers so they are committed to creating gender equity and have the skills and confidence to do so. Everyone should understand the role they can play in promoting gender equity in their day-to-day work. Without this, there is a risk that any organisational commitments to gender equity made in strategic documents will ‘sit on a shelf’, without staff having the understanding, skills and confidence to follow through and implement them.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for all workers to participate. Consider targeting activity to specific groups (e.g. teams, work groups, different levels of the organisation). This may be particularly suitable in organisations that are large, have multiple sites or have a diverse workforce.</p> <p>Workers can be involved in a number of different ways. For example, they can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct an employee survey to identify knowledge and needs • run training and capacity-building activities for staff • organise events, such as for International Women’s Day • be part of a gender equity workplace committee.
<p>Engage leaders</p>	<p>Engaging leaders and building their capacity to be informed and committed advocates for gender equity is vital for supporting, driving and sustaining change.</p> <p>Engaging leaders helps to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gain the necessary permissions, resources and support for change • embed gender equity into organisational systems • create visible role models that reinforce the importance of gender equity to the organisation • build leadership capacity to foster and maintain safe, equal and respectful gender relations in the workplace. <p>Senior leaders and management can be engaged in a number of different ways, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training • informal opportunities such as attendance at events or via regular communication.
<p>Involve women and men</p>	<p>It is vital that both women and men are involved in creating gender equity and respectful relationships.</p> <p>Highlight women’s voices and experiences.</p> <p>Consider the role of men and be mindful of the complexities. Men play an important role in preventing violence against women through promoting gender equality and respect and challenging gender stereotypes in their professional and personal lives. While there is potential for profound benefits from men’s engagement, there are significant complexities and risks of reproducing the gender inequalities that we are attempting to change.</p> <p>Seek advice from experts and specialist organisations as required.</p>

Build staff capacity to understand and take action to support gender equity

Raising awareness and building the skills and confidence of staff to promote gender equity in their work is essential to creating gender equity in the workplace.

Activities to raise awareness and build staff capacity should focus on:

- the prevalence and key drivers of violence against women
- gender-based disparities in Australian workplaces and the prevalence of violence against women in the workplace
- communicating the link between gender inequality and violence against women. This is important for everyone to understand so it is clear how the work being done to support gender equity actively contributes to the prevention of violence against women. This link is not widely understood and can take time for people to absorb
- the health, social and economic benefits of gender equity
- the important role of workplaces in promoting gender equity. Highlight key policy documents and share ideas/examples of how gender equity is being embedded within the organisation
- the role everyone can play in promoting gender equity in their day-to-day work.

Influencing the attitudes and behaviour of staff takes time and requires multiple and mutually reinforcing strategies. It is important to take every opportunity to raise awareness and build the capacity of women and men at all levels of the organisation to understand and take action to support gender equity – learning doesn't just happen through formal opportunities. Informal opportunities such as individual conversations and sharing relevant articles play an important role.

Four key strategies to raise awareness and build staff capacity are:

- staff training
- information sessions and events
- resources
- communication.

It is important to take every opportunity to raise awareness and build the capacity of women and men at all levels of the organisation to understand and take action to support gender equity.

Strategies	Tips and considerations
Staff training	<p>Training should have a clear purpose, reflect staff needs and be delivered in a way that enables worker participation.</p> <p>The focus of the training sessions could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding gender inequality as a key driver of violence against women • taking bystander action when witnessing sexism or gender inequality in the workplace • understanding and addressing unconscious knowledge and bias • supporting colleagues who are experiencing family violence. <p>A number of training programs with a focus on gender equality and preventing violence against women exist, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VicHealth short courses, www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/courses-and-events/vichealth-short-courses • Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria training, www.dvrcv.org.au/training
Information sessions and events	<p>Information sessions and events publically demonstrate an organisation’s commitment to gender equity and help to engage the workforce. Below are some general considerations for planning events that have a focus on gender equity and the prevention of violence against women.</p> <p>Engage women in the consultation, planning and delivery of events, and invite women as guest speakers. Events and activities that focus on women’s leadership and voices promote gender equality.</p> <p>Consider the role of men. If the event is associated with male-led campaigns such as White Ribbon Day, men within the workplace should lead the planning and delivery of the event. Don’t invite a perpetrator of violence against women to speak.</p> <p>Consider engaging a victim/survivor of violence as guest speaker. To do so, work with an organisation that supports victims of violence to speak publicly about the prevention of violence against women, as these programs include processes to support victims’ safety (e.g. debriefing and counselling) so event organisers can be confident that the wellbeing of the victim is prioritised.</p> <p>Consider linking the event to broader campaigns to prevent violence against women:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/ • 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, 25 November to 10 December http://16dayscwg.l.rutgers.edu/about/campaign-profile • White Ribbon Day, 25 November www.whiteribbon.org.au • Week Without Violence, third week in October www.worldywca.org/Events/Week-Without-Violence <p>Provide information on local family violence and sexual assault support services and encourage employees and their families to access these services.</p>

Strategies	Tips and considerations
Resources	<p>A range of existing resources can be used to raise awareness and build staff capacity. It is important that relevant information about gender equity and violence against women is provided and relevant workplace policies are accessible in suitable locations (e.g. noticeboards), relevant formats (e.g. multiple languages) and at suitable times (e.g. recruitment and induction).</p> <p>Resources and information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VicHealth, www.vichealth.vic.gov.au <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VicHealth's Equal Footing workplace toolkit www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/equal-footing-toolkit - VicHealth, <i>Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria</i> www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/preventing-violence-before-it-occurs • <i>Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia</i> www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/0aa0109b-6b03-43f2-85fe-a9f5ec92ae4e/Change-the-story-framework-prevent-violence-women-children-AA-new.pdf.aspx • Our Watch, www.ourwatch.org.au (including quality framework for workplaces to prevent violence against women, due 2016) • Workplace Gender Equality Agency, www.wgea.gov.au • Victorian Government Gender Equality Strategy (due 2016) <p>Videos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VicHealth, <i>National Community Attitudes Survey on Violence Against Women</i> www.youtube.com/watch?v=8E7RGjk69T4 • VicHealth, <i>Bystander action</i>, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4R5KVIPReYs • Our Watch, <i>Let's change the story: violence against women in Australia</i> www.youtube.com/watch?v=b62CU28ArPo • Our Watch, <i>It's up to you, it's up to me</i>, www.youtube.com/watch?v=tB7Pkcue9Rk • Our Watch, <i>The Line campaign</i>, www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-(1)/The-Line • Australian Government, <i>Respect</i>, www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjBfU-bfGII <p>Family violence support services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service, www.1800respect.org.au • Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre, www.safesteps.org.au • InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, http://intouch.asn.au • Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, www.fvpls.org/index.php

Strategies	Tips and considerations
<p>Clear communications</p>	<p>Clear communication and messaging is vital to raise awareness and build staff capacity. It may be suitable to develop a whole-of-organisation communications and marketing strategy to guide communications around gender equity.</p> <p>Consider the following in workplace communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how violence against women can be prevented through promoting gender equality and breaking down adherence to rigid gender stereotypes. • Provide practical advice on how people can promote gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes in their personal and professional lives. • Tailor language and examples so that the concepts are clear and accessible. • Ensure the imagery, tone and language used in communications is inclusive, acknowledges diversity and is checked for gender assumptions. • Focus on the benefits of gender equity and where possible, use language and concepts that align with the workplace or team. For example, when talking with Human Resources staff, make links between gender equity and preventing violence against women with workplace productivity, staff morale and occupational health and safety. • Develop messages that engage men in ways that encourage them to participate but do not play down the reality of gender inequality and sexist behaviour. • Ensure that messages are based on evidence, for example by referencing current evidence-based documents such as <i>Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia</i>, and are consistent across different communication channels.

Embed gender equity into organisational systems

Embedding gender equity into organisational systems is a critical way to support and sustain gender equity in work environments, cultures and conditions. Creating organisational change and influencing organisational systems takes time. Four key strategies to embed gender equity into organisational systems are:

- integrating gender equity into existing strategic plans, policies and practices
- developing a gender equity or preventing violence against women strategy
- embedding gender equity within Human Resources
- establishing supportive workplace structures.

<p>Integrate gender equity into existing strategic plans, policies, and practices</p>	<p>Integrating gender equity into existing strategic plans, policies and practices creates a workplace environment, culture and conditions that support gender equity.</p> <p>There may be numerous opportunities to embed gender equity. Consider the breadth of organisational plans and policies in which gender equity could be embedded, alongside the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on integrating gender equity in strategic documents that hold considerable influence on organisational priorities and actions and that place a sense of accountability on the workplace through internal and external reporting. • Aim to integrate gender equity into organisational frameworks, to help ensure that other policies and plans under that framework also consider gender equity. • Align gender equity with the purpose and key priorities of existing strategies and policies. • Include multi-year commitments within strategies to address gender equity and prevent violence against women, to ensure activities to deliver on these commitments occur over multiple years. • Be aware of key processes and timeframes that impact the development and updating of workplace policies and strategic documents. Develop relationships with staff responsible for these strategies. • Be mindful that consultations to develop strategies are key processes to build awareness and capacity to promote gender equity. • Seek expert advice from organisations or individuals as needed.
<p>Develop a gender equity or preventing violence against women strategy</p>	<p>Developing a stand-alone strategy on gender equity or the prevention of violence against women may help workplaces to achieve an integrated, whole-of-organisation approach to gender equity.</p> <p>Developing, implementing and monitoring strategies requires commitment and skilled staff.</p>
<p>Embed gender equity within Human Resources</p>	<p>Working with Human Resources might help ensure that efforts to change organisational cultures to better support gender equity and respect are also reflected in human resources policies and processes. Possible actions that could be implemented by Human Resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inclusion of a family violence leave and support clause in the organisation's enterprise agreement. These clauses aim to support staff experiencing family violence and provide a consistent and positive approach to responding to disclosures of family violence • training of Human Resources staff to understand the impacts of family violence in the workplace, the gendered nature of family violence and the supports available to staff experiencing family violence • applying a gender lens to human resources policies that are being reviewed or developed, to ensure the policy supports gender equity. For example, ensuring that part-time workers have access to study support and opportunities for higher duties, consideration of how unconscious bias might affect recruitment, and promoting flexible work policies to women and men. See <i>Applying a gender lens in the workplace</i> at vichealth.vic.gov.au/GEAR-tools for more information • providing leadership and administrative support for training and events on preventing violence against women and gender equity.

**Establish
supportive
workplace
structures**

Supportive workplace structures such as networks, committees and working groups can help to embed gender equity in organisations. These groups may have a sole focus on gender equity and preventing violence against women, or consider gender equity as one component of a broader remit.

Committees can play an important role in:

- driving and sustaining activity to create gender equity
- acting as a consultation mechanism for gender equity activity
- ensuring that organisations are accountable and act on their stated commitments
- engaging workplace champions.

Consider expanding the remit of an existing committee to include gender equity, or establishing a new committee. It is important to ensure a diverse range of stakeholders are represented in its membership. A gender balance for membership is encouraged.

Working with Human Resources might help ensure that efforts to change organisational cultures to better support gender equity and respect are also reflected in human resources policies and processes.

CASE STUDY

Embedding gender equity into the strategic plans of local government

The table below shows how Monash City Council embedded gender equity into a number of their strategic plans of local government. Gender equity was integrated into a number of existing strategic plans, policies and practices and a new strategy was created to support Council achieve an integrated, whole-of-organisation approach to gender equity.

Strategy	Strategic document	Reference to gender equity and preventing violence against women
Integrate gender equity into existing strategic plans, policies, and practices	Council Plan 2013–2017 www.monash.vic.gov.au/About-Us/Council/Publications/Council-Plan	<p>A key community outcome is ‘Communities and organisations promote respect and equality and prevent violence against women’.</p> <p>The strategy to achieve this outcome was to ‘implement the Generating Equality and Respect program, which aims to build equal and respectful relationships between men and women and prevent violence against women’.</p>
	Monash Health and Wellbeing Partnership Plan 2013–2017 http://www.monash.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/about-us/council/advisory-and-special-committees/health-and-wellbeing-partnership-plan-2013-2017.pdf	<p>Gender equity is a guiding principle of the plan and preventing violence against women is a key health priority.</p> <p>The Mayor’s foreword profiles gender equity as a key consideration for health and wellbeing and highlights the Generating Equality and Respect program as an important project of Council.</p>
	Access and Equity Framework 2013–2017 www.monash.vic.gov.au/About-Us/Council/Publications/Access-and-Equity	<p>Gender equity was integrated into Council’s Access and Equity Framework. As this framework includes a number of Council policies relating to social justice, integration into this framework helped to ensure that other Council policies and plans under this framework also considered gender equity.</p> <p>The framework articulates that “Council has a role to play in the development of a socially just, healthy, inclusive and sustainable community where all members irrespective of their ability, gender, social, ethnic, or economic background can fully and fairly participate in community life. This framework will ensure that all Council policies and strategies consider and integrate these rights-based principles.”</p>

Strategy	Strategic document	Reference to gender equity and preventing violence against women
<p>Integrate gender equity into existing strategic plans, policies, and practices (continued)</p>	<p>Monash Youth Plan 2013–2016 www.monash.vic.gov.au/About-Us/Council/Publications/Plans-and-Strategies/Youth-Plan</p>	<p>Two actions in the Youth Plan recognise the role of local government in preventing violence against women, specifically with young people. These include ‘Develop a Positive Peer Relationship initiative for young people in Years 7 and 8 using a whole-school approach’, and ‘Enhance youth service providers’ capacity to deliver good practice respectful relationships education’.</p>
<p>Develop a gender equity or preventing violence against women strategy</p>	<p>Gender Equity Strategy 2015–2020 http://www.monash.vic.gov.au/About-Us/Council/Publications/Plans-and-Strategies/Gender-Equity-Strategy</p>	<p>The Gender Equity Strategy aims to support Council to achieve an integrated, whole-of-organisation approach to gender equity. It will ensure that gender equity is considered and prioritised in all current and future Council planning, policy, service delivery and practice. The vision of the Strategy is for an inclusive and gender-equitable city, where females and males are treated with respect and have equal opportunities, decision-making power and responsibilities, regardless of their gender.</p> <p>The Strategy sits under the Access and Equity Framework, which ensures the Gender Equity Strategy considers other elements of diversity and equity, and that other Council strategies also consider gender equity.</p>





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