Guidelines for gender neutral recruitment
The South Australian Government acknowledges and respects Aboriginal peoples as the State’s first peoples and nations and recognises Aboriginal peoples as traditional owners and occupants of land and waters in South Australia.
Gender neutral recruitment

Our vision for South Australia is a place where women and girls will be able to fully participate in and share the benefits of living in South Australia.

To achieve women’s equal participation in all aspects of life, three pillars of action have been identified – improving women’s economic status, increasing women’s leadership and participation and improving women’s safety and wellbeing. Pillar one focusses on the importance of investing in women’s futures and is a strategy for the economic empowerment of women as a way to achieve gender equality. Ensuring gender neutral recruitment practices will help to address barriers women face in fully participating in the workplace and achieving their full potential.

For many years increasing women’s participation in employment has been argued as a matter of equality and the ‘right’ thing to do. Today women’s full participation in employment is argued on the basis of economics - it is now the ‘smart’ thing to do.

Maximising the potential of a diverse workforce is not only a social imperative, but is also a competitive advantage. From a business vantage point, to best serve the market one must “employ the market.”

To ensure the selection of diverse talent, policies and practices need to reflect the needs of the people they are seeking to recruit.

In 2014/15, 9.7% of women in Australia wanted to work more hours than they currently had.

What is the problem?

It is well documented that for a variety of reasons, fewer women reach positions of power and authority. This phenomenon has been called the “glass ceiling” effect, in which there are no apparent barriers yet a systemic gender imbalanced outcome persists.

In recruitment, this phenomenon has been explained in recent times as being influenced by “unconscious bias,” or processes that occur in our subconscious thinking that skew (or ‘bias’) our decision making towards particular outcomes. These can occur even when we think we are being fair and equitable in our approach.

It is important to remember however that overt biases also exist, and that sexist attitudes continue to pervade society despite many decades of work to reveal and address them.

These implicit gendered biases benefit men and hamper the progress of women. Gendered stereotypes and expectations continue to affect hiring and promotion processes, to the detriment of women. It is possible, however, to work to address these biases and improve women’s leadership and participation.

Case study:

A 2011 study of over 60,000 people found that while 54% of participants claimed to have no preference for their boss’ gender, the remaining 46% preferred male to female bosses by a ratio of more than 2 to1.¹ The authors of this study found that of those preferring a male boss, reasons given often focused on negative attributes of female bosses, and displayed beliefs in women’s incompetence for leadership.

Women experience poorer economic outcomes than men. Their superannuation balances are lower, they are subject to pay gaps, they have low representation in highly paid positions and as board members and chairs, they bear the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, and are more often employed part-time than men.iii

Case study:
In 2003, two American professors ran a study of students using the real-life case of Heidi Roizen, a successful venture capitalist. The students were divided into two groups and asked to read and rate the case, however one of the groups got a copy that had the name changed to ‘Howard’. When polling the students after reading the case, the professors found that while students found Heidi and Howard equally competent, Howard was seen as appealing and Heidi as selfish. As Cheryl Sandberg notes in her book Lean In, “when a man is successful, he is liked by both men and women. When a woman is successful, people of both genders like her less.”¹ When this experiment was rerun in 2013, with the names Kathryn and Martin, participants liked Kathryn more, but trusted her less, than Martin.

Everyone is subject to stereotypes and assumptions about what is appropriate for their perceived gender regarding traits, behaviours and attributes. In fields such as science, it has been shown that gender-based stereotypes contribute to bias against women by failing to take into account that men will more often boast about their accomplishments than women, and hiring employers will take this prediction of higher future performance at face value. iv

Women are also penalised for displaying characteristics praised in men, such as leadership traits. It has been shown that across the world, when people are asked to name leadership qualities, these are stereotypically masculine qualities. Additionally, stereotypes align men with leadership, but when women are leaders they are seen as being unfeminine. v

When women do all the ‘right things’ that an ideal worker should do to get ahead such as working full-time consistently without periods of self-employment or part-time work, and without breaks for family or personal reasons, they still do not benefit as much as men. vi

Working to counteract unconsciously held biases that hinder women’s progress will improve not only the fairness of hiring processes, but outcomes for organisations such as a greater belief in the success of the company. vii

Business Case
It has been shown on several occasions that employing a gender diverse workforce has positive effects on the bottom line. In 2009, Goldman Sachs and JBWere published findings that closing the gap between male and female rates of employment had the potential to boost Australia’s GDP by 11%. viii

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Further support is evident in Credit Suisse’s 2012 report ‘Gender diversity and corporate leadership’, in which the performance of almost 2400 companies (with and without women board members) was analysed. This report found that in the time period 2006-2012, in terms of share price performance, companies that had at least one woman on the board outperformed those with no women by between 17 and 26 percent. It has also been shown that increasing women’s representation on boards can lower the incidence of company fraud.

The Grattan Institute have also stated that increasing women’s workforce participation in Australia is one of three major opportunities to increase the size of the Australian economy, and that by removing disincentives for women to enter the paid workforce, there is potential to increase the size of the Australian economy by 6%, or about $25 billion per year.

What is gender neutral recruitment?

Gender neutral recruitment is the removal of gender-identifying information from the application or resume of an applicant to minimise the risk of bias occurring against the applicant based on their gender.

It is a process that seeks to minimise the risk of gender-based biases coming into play when hiring staff, and to even the playing field for men and women applying for positions.

What are people already doing?

In May 2016 the Victorian Government announced that they would be running an 18-month pilot program seeking to avoid biases during the recruitment process by removing applicants’ name, gender, age and location from applications. Through this initiative it is hoped that any potential bias during the recruitment process – including race, class and age bias as well as gender bias – will be avoided.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recognised recently that there was an imbalance in the gender of senior staff, which comprised only 21% women. This prompted them to change their recruitment process, concealing names, genders and other identifying details of hundreds of applicants. In the language of the advertisements for these 19 senior positions, the organisation also emphasised aspects of the positions such as flexible hours and work-from-home options. Of the 19 positions, using this process, 15 of the successful applicants were women. Chief Operating Officer at the ABS, Jonathon Palmer, has reportedly stated that perhaps employers are just not asking women what they want from the organisations they work for.

In an effort to reduce this, Australian employers including Australia Post, Westpac, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, PWC and Melbourne University are partnering with the Victorian State Government to roll out an anonymous application process towards the end of this year.

Similar pilot programs in the UK have gained significant support, with large employers like KPMG agreeing to implement nameless CVs in the near future.
There are a number of techniques that can be put into practice to work towards gender neutral recruitment.

**Job advertisements**
Job advertisements need to be written in a ‘gender neutral’ way, ensuring you use inclusive language. Research shows that a lack of gender-inclusive wording has significant implications when targeting women, as some words and phrases are stereotypically masculine and this can put women off applying.

If you offer flexible working arrangements, make this obvious in all your job advertisements. Women who have young families or caring duties outside work may be more likely to apply if they can see that your organisation offers flexible ways of working.

- **Words at Work**: the Diversity Council of Australia have released a guide to inclusive language.
- **Gender decoder**: a free online tool to check whether a job advert includes subtle male language that discourages women applicants.

- **Guidelines for writing and publishing recruitment advertisements**: The Australian Human Rights Commission guide for employers, recruitment and employment agencies and those who publish or display job ads to help them develop gender inclusive advertisements.

**‘Blind’ recruitment**
*Blind recruitment* practices involve the removal of bias against applicants based on their gender, race or cultural background from the entirety of the recruitment process.

- **Recruit Smarter** *(Victorian Government)* – a pilot project that aims to address unconscious bias at the recruitment stage by removing personal details such as name, age, and gender when assessing people’s job applications.

- **Name Blind Recruitment** *(UK Civil Service)* – recruitment processes remove the candidate’s name and other personal information such as their nationality or the university they attended to ensure candidates are assessed by merit and not on their background, race or gender.
Language

Words are powerful. How we speak to and about each other impacts how we treat each other and influences workplace culture. When it comes to recruitment, words can either encourage or discourage women, and men, from applying for jobs or seeking out promotional opportunities.

Focussing on language that is inclusive and respectful of everyone is an easy way to encourage a broader field of applicants. It also helps to reduce unconscious bias in recruitment practices.

The Technical University of Munich found that the wording of advertisements affected the likelihood of women applying for positions. Women were less likely to apply for positions that sounded ‘male’ such as ‘determined’ or ‘assertive’ due to the association of these words with male or masculine stereotypes. For male participants in the study, whether the wording was stereotypically masculine or feminine made no difference to the likelihood they would apply.

Case study:

Social media platform Buffer found that as their company grew, they saw a pitifully small number of women applying for developer jobs – less than 2% in fact. Following a research and feedback period, the company came to the conclusion that their choice of wording, such as for developer positions – “hacker” – was potentially skewing the gender of applicants for these positions. Substituting the word “developer” for the word “hacker” was one step of many that the company ended up taking, including now publishing their diversity data publicly.

• Words at work: the importance of language
  Diversity Council Australia – a guide to the use of language that respectful, accurate and relevant to all within the workplace.


Job Evaluation

Job evaluation is a key human resource process that looks at the ranking and hierarchy of jobs within an organisation. There is a significant opportunity when conducting a job evaluation to include an investigation of gender bias within the system of positions with regard to the nature and value of work. Below are some excellent guides on conducting a gender-inclusive job evaluation.

Consider conducting an audit of your current position descriptions, to identify biases and uncover any gendered language that may be discouraging women from applying.

- **Guide to the Australian Standard on gender-inclusive job evaluation** Workplace Gender Equality Agency – a guide to ensure job evaluation and grading systems fully and fairly measure the significant components of all jobs being evaluated without gender bias.

- **Gender Neutral Job Evaluation for Equal Pay: A Step by Step Guide** International Labour Association – tools that help to establish the relative value of jobs to ensure equal pay.

What else can we do?

**Let people know what you’re doing**

A great way to be accountable is to make your numbers public. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency collects data from organisations with 500 or more staff on six measures detailing the gender diversity of their workplaces, encouraging companies to pay attention to the issue of gender and to make this a part of everyday thinking about workplace policy.

Consider publicising the work you are doing on unconscious bias and gender neutral recruitment. This shows your commitment, and will hold you accountable to both your staff and the public.

**Ask for feedback**

Ask your female staff for feedback on how you are doing as far as being a gender inclusive organisation. Ask what you could do better, and in which areas.

You could also consider providing women leaving your organisation with the opportunity to give feedback, or to participate in an exit interview.

**Get other organisations involved**

Consider partnering with or asking for tips from organisations who have already implemented gender neutral recruiting.

**Put your Words into Action**

Use the Premier’s Council for Women guide *Words into Action* to guide your work towards gender neutral recruitment and the inclusion of women at work.
Examine your workplace culture

Hannah Piterman’s 2008 paper for the Commonwealth Government lists four areas where sexist values and practices may be embedded in organisations:

- **Culture** – is your workplace male-dominated? How did it come to be this way?
- **Leadership** – how does your organisation conceptualise great leaders? Who gets the promotions, and why?
- **Gender relations** – are there stereotypical beliefs about gender in your organisation? Do the work structures disadvantage or marginalise women?
- **Work/life balance** – how flexible are the positions at your organisation? How easy is it for employees to work off-site, or as works best for them?

**Set goals**

Setting measurable goals for percentage or proportional increases can give you a real target for which to aim.

**Educate people**

Tell your organisation what you are doing and why. This will potentially minimise the risk of any objections based on notions of ‘reverse discrimination’ or other grounds.
List of resources


- **Guidelines for writing and publishing recruitment advertisements** – The Australian Human Rights Commission guide for employers, recruitment and employment agencies and those who publish or display job ads to help them develop gender inclusive advertisements.

- **Recognise bias during recruitment** Queensland Government – Tips on overcoming bias and increasing gender diversity across all recruitment aspects.

- **Increasing the Number of Women in Senior Executive Positions: Improving Recruitment, Selection and Retention Practices** Business Council of Australia – examples of best practices in recruitment, appointment and promotion and how they are embedded within strong, sustained and de-gendered talent identification, performance feedback, development and succession planning processes.

- **The Leadership Challenge: Women in Management** – this paper makes case for the inclusion of women in senior management and gives a broad range of evidence showing the structural inequities relating to gender in management, and describes strategies to address the issue.

- **Words at Work** – the Diversity Council of Australia have released a guide to inclusive language.

- **Gender Worx: Getting to Grips with Unconscious Bias** – an introduction to the concept of unconscious bias.

- **‘Waiter, is that inclusion in my soup?’** A new recipe to improve business performance – an inclusion and diversity guide for business.

- **Recruit Smarter (Victorian Government)** – a pilot project that aims to address unconscious bias at the recruitment stage by removing personal details such as name, age, and gender when assessing people’s job applications.

- **Name Blind Recruitment (UK Civil Service)** – recruitment processes remove the candidate’s name and other personal information such as their nationality or the university they attended to ensure candidates are assessed by merit and not on their background, race or gender.

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References


Feedback
DCSI Client Feedback
GPO Box 292 Adelaide SA 5001
Email: clientfeedback@dcsi.sa.gov.au

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