



Guidelines for gender neutral recruitment



Government of
South Australia

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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

What is the problem?

When we look at higher paid jobs, or jobs that have more power and authority over decision-making, we can see that there are fewer women than men in these kinds of roles. This means that women's experiences are not being included at the upper levels of management where changes are made that have significant effects on how organisations run, and how services are delivered. More diversity in these roles means that a greater variety of life experiences can be considered, as people of diverse backgrounds bring different knowledge, skills and understandings.

Some industries have a much higher proportion of men than women, and vice versa. This can be because people see some kinds of work as more 'feminine' or more 'masculine'. We can see this, for example, in the high proportions of women in health and community work; and in the high proportions of men in construction and mining. We know that this isn't because men and women can't do other kinds of work, but because there are expectations based on society's perceptions of gender.

Stereotypes

When we see one gender as better suited to particular kinds of work, these are stereotypes. Everyone is affected by stereotypes about what is appropriate for their gender in areas like personal traits and behaviours.

Bias

When we say a person is 'biased', it means that their decision-making is affected by worldviews or beliefs that mean they are more likely to privilege some kinds of people over others. Gender bias is when people make decisions based on a belief that people of a particular gender are better or worse at something because of their gender.

Conscious and Unconscious Bias

Holding a belief that a person is better or worse at something because of their gender is a 'conscious bias'. When you acknowledge that you make decisions because of certain criteria, like gender, this shows a "conscious bias" because you are aware of it. Sometimes we can think we have a gender equal mindset but can still show bias in our decision-making. This is called having "unconscious bias" because we are not aware of it.

Why should we care?

On average, women end up with less money than men over their lifetime. They are paid less, they have less superannuation, they do most of the unpaid work in the home like chores and caring for children, sick or older family members, or family members living with disability, and they are more often employed part-time than men.¹ These responsibilities and outcomes contribute to making women more stressed, more anxious and more prone to mental health struggles on average than men. It also means they have less work-life balance, and their careers will often take a back seat to their caring roles.

When we acknowledge these imbalances, we can start to make changes to address them.

Applying gender neutral recruitment strategies can help women access jobs that have greater levels of responsibility and authority, and can improve their financial stability and security, leading to greater freedom and lower stress and anxiety levels.



Business Case

When companies employ a diverse workforce, they have better financial outcomes.² Increasing women's workforce participation in Australia has been reported to be one of three major opportunities to increasing the size of the Australian economy.

By removing barriers for women to enter the workforce, the Australian economy could grow by 6%, or about \$25 billion per year.³

What is gender neutral recruitment?

Gender neutral recruitment is a process that tries to reduce gender-based bias when hiring staff, and to provide a more equal opportunity for people applying for jobs.

It most commonly includes removing gender identifying information from job applications or resumés to reduce the risk of gender bias against the applicant.

How do you do it?

There are a few ways to work towards gender neutral recruitment. Here are some ideas you can use to get started.

Job advertisements

Research has shown that there are certain terms or phrases and ways of writing job ads that can subtly encourage men to apply and can put women off applying for jobs. This could be phrases like “determined”, “assertive”, “social media gun” or “content ninja”, or “your job is your life”. This kind of wording can create the idea that the job is in a masculine-oriented workplace, or that the job does not cater to people who have caring responsibilities.

Try

Writing job advertisements in a ‘gender neutral’ way, using inclusive language. See [Words at Work](#), the Diversity Council of Australia guide to inclusive language.

If you offer flexible work, make this clear in all your job ads. Women who have young families or caring responsibilities outside work may be more likely to apply if they can see that you offer flexible work arrangements.

Helpful resources

Gender decoder – a free online tool to check whether a job advert includes subtle language that discourages women applicants.

Guidelines for writing and publishing recruitment advertisements – The Australian Human Rights Commission guide for employers, recruitment and employment agencies.



Job evaluation

Job evaluation looks at the ranking and hierarchy of jobs within an organisation and looks for gender bias in the job role system of the organisation.

Try

Taking a look at your org chart and seeing what kinds of work are classified as more valuable. Is this work gendered? Are there roles that involve caring or domestic work? How are these valued?

Helpful resources

Guide to the Australian Standard on gender-inclusive job evaluation

Workplace Gender Equality Agency – a guide to meeting the Australian Standard on job evaluation and grading

'Blind' recruitment

Blind recruitment is about removing bias against applicants based on their gender, race or cultural background, by removing information from their application that could identify these attributes.

Try

Removing personal information that is unrelated to an applicant's capacity to fulfil the role such as name, gender, address and higher education institution.

Helpful resources

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 from 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.

Has anyone else done it?

In May 2016, the Victorian Government announced that they would be running an 18 month pilot program titled 'Recruit Smarter' that hides the applicant's name, gender, age, and location.⁴ This project aimed to remove race, class and age bias as well as gender bias. A report published in 2018 following this pilot showed that before removing gendered information from applications, men were 30% more likely than women to be shortlisted for jobs, and 33% more likely to be hired. After the pilot program where gender information was removed from applications, men were only 6% more likely than women to be shortlisted, while women were 8% more likely to be hired than men.⁵

In 2016, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recognised that only 21% of their senior staff were women. This prompted them to change their recruitment process, removing name, gender and other identifying details of hundreds of applicants. In the language of the advertisements for 19 senior positions, the ABS also emphasised flexible hours and work-from-home options. Using this process, of the 19 positions, 15 of the people they hired were women.⁶



What else can we do?

Keep your staff informed

Tell your organisation what you are doing and why. This will keep your employees up to date and may address any backlash about 'reverse discrimination' or perceptions of unfair treatment.

Publish your progress

A great way to be accountable is to publish information about how your organisation is progressing on gender equality. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency collect data from organisations with 100 or more staff about the gender diversity of their workplaces. WGEA encourages companies to pay attention to gender and to make this a part of everyday thinking about workplace policy.

Think about publishing the work you are doing on unconscious bias and gender neutral recruitment to your employees, or to the public. This shows people that you are willing to try to do better and will make you accountable to both your staff and the public.

Go for balance

If you are recruiting for a position, make sure your shortlist of candidates is gender balanced. Also make sure any interview panels are diverse in terms of gender, background, age, ethnicity and ability.

Examine who is considered for promotions, and why. If women are routinely left out of consideration for promotions or opportunities, investigate the reasons behind the patterns and put approaches in place to address imbalances.

Ask for feedback

Ask your female staff for feedback on how you are doing - ask what you could do better, and in which areas.

Send a survey around that employees can complete anonymously asking about how they see your workplace in terms of gender diversity and gender equality. Anonymous surveys often mean you get more honest feedback.

Give women leaving your organisation the chance to give an exit interview and use this as another way of collecting feedback.

Get other organisations involved

Consider partnering with, or asking for tips from, organisations who are already doing gender neutral recruiting.

Examine your workplace culture

Is your workplace dominated by men? Is there a culture that allows sexual harassment to happen, or sexist comments to go unchallenged? Is working from home frowned upon? Look at the culture in your workplace and think about whether there are opportunities to make it more welcoming for women.

Train up your staff

Look for training courses on gender equality, unconscious bias, or other diversity areas that you can use to upskill your staff on working towards a more diverse, inclusive and equitable workplace.

PWC and UN Women developed a free online course called [Building Gender IQ](#) to upskill people in their understandings of gender. Consider mandating this for your employees.

Connect people at different levels

If you have new employees coming in at entry level on a regular basis, consider linking them in with a network of women at higher levels so that newer female employees can see pathways for them to grow and flourish in their careers. If you are part of an industry network, you could consider putting together a cross-organisational program that creates new connections across organisations.

Set goals

Setting measurable goals for percentage or proportional increases can give you a real target to aim for. Targets definitely make a difference. In 2004, Norway put in place a gender quota of 40% for publicly owned and publicly listed boards to be women. At the time the law was introduced, representation of women on publicly listed boards was 7%. In 2017, it was reported to be over 40%.⁷

Support gender diverse employees

While most of your employees may identify as men or women, there may be a smaller cohort that do not identify with the gender binary and may identify in a different way – perhaps non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer or another identification. Supporting these employees to feel safe and welcome will further support gender equality in your organisation. [Learn more about gender pronouns through this fact sheet produced by Shine SA](#), or this [glossary of common terms produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies](#).

An easy way to show you support gender diverse people in your organisation is to invite staff to add their gender pronouns to their email signature, for example ‘he/him’ for male identifying employees, ‘she/her’ for female identifying employees, and ‘they/them’ for non-binary employees.

List of Resources

Male Champions of Change – **Building a Gender-Balanced and Inclusive Presence**

Male Champions of Change – **In the Eye of the Beholder: Avoiding the Merit Trap**

Australian Human Rights Commission – **A step-by-step guide to preventing discrimination in recruitment**

DESE Inclusive Recruitment toolkit

Shine SA - **Gender pronouns fact sheet**

Australian Institute of Family Studies – **Glossary of common terms in the LGBTIQA+ community**

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.

Interrupt bias during recruitment

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

Words at Work the Diversity Council of Australia guide to inclusive language.

‘Waiter, is that inclusion in my soup? A new recipe to improve business performance’ by Deloitte and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

WGEA Gender equitable recruitment and promotion guide

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.

Guide to the Australian Standard on gender-inclusive job evaluation –

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

Gender decoder – a free online tool to check whether a job advert includes language that might discourage non-male applicants.

PWC and UN Women **‘HeForShe’ open access training module ‘Building Gender IQ’**

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Feedback

DHS Feedback and Complaints
GPO Box 292, Adelaide SA 5001

Email: DHS.clientfeedbackandcomplaints@sa.gov.au

Website: <https://dhs.sa.gov.au/contact/feedback-and-complaints>

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