

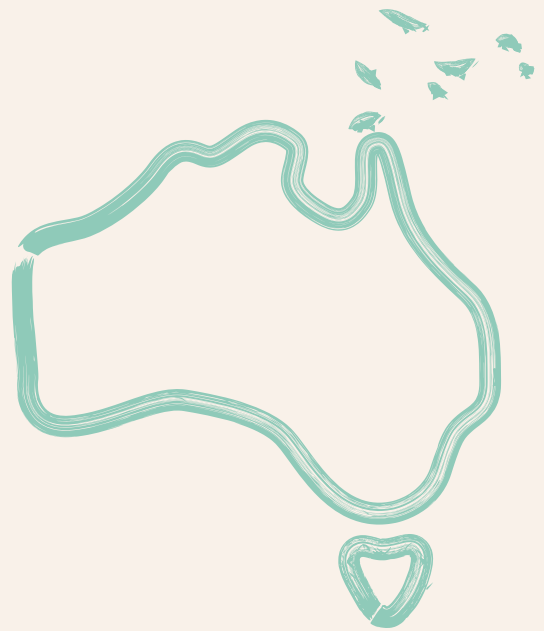
Creating safer workplaces

A guide to engaging men
in the prevention of
violence against women



**Our
Watch**

Preventing violence
against women

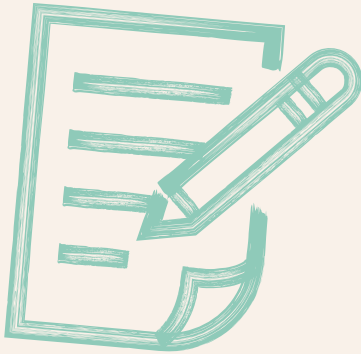


Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge, and language for over 65,000 years.

As a non-Aboriginal organisation, Our Watch understands that violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is an issue for the whole community. As highlighted in Our Watch's national resource *Changing the picture*, the evidence clearly shows the intersection between racism, sexism, and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Our Watch has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, who continue to suffer from violence at a significantly higher rate than non-Aboriginal women. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations who continue to lead the work of sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous people and relentlessly advocate for an equitable, violence-free future in Australia.



About the authors

This guide was created for Our Watch by KJ Reyes Ellul and Trent Larkman.

KJ Reyes Ellul (he/him) is a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence educator with vast experience across the education, health, youth and community sectors in NSW. Aligning with anti-oppressive practice and social justice principles, KJ has worked extensively with culturally diverse and LGBTIQ+ communities in the development and delivery of community-based health education, training, violence prevention and support programs.

Trent Larkman (he/him) is a safety and inclusivity educator who works alongside community-based organisations and businesses to foster safe and inclusive cultures. He specialises in engaging men in efforts to prevent violence against women, recognising the critical role they play in cultural change. His work facilitates and supports both individual transformation and systemic cultural change, with a focus on preventing and responding to gendered violence, family violence, sexual harassment, bullying, homophobia, and all forms of discrimination. With a career spanning over a decade across Australia and international settings, Trent brings a wealth of experience, and a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in cultural change and violence prevention.

Suggested citation: Our Watch. (2024). *Creating safer workplaces: Engaging men in the prevention of violence against women*.

Contents

About this guide	5
Who this guide is for	5
Using this guide	6
Part 1: Scoping opportunities and planning for action	12
Part 2: Assessing your plan for meaningful action	21
Part 3: Moving into action: Practical examples	26
Evaluation	32
Conclusion	33

About this guide

Creating safer workplaces: Engaging men in the prevention of violence against women is designed for professionals responsible for people, culture, and safety. It offers practical strategies to help engage men in fostering gender equality and preventing violence in the workplace.

In this resource, we lay out the principles that should guide the work of engaging men, supporting people, culture and safety teams to plan for action and assess their work. Finally, we provide some practical ways in which workplaces can engage men. The guide will equip relevant teams in workplaces with tools to create meaningful and lasting cultural change. This guide is flexible and supports both small actions and more significant initiatives, helping create safer, more inclusive workplaces.

Who this guide is for

This resource is intended to support professionals responsible for managing people, culture, and safety within organisations, such as those in human resources or people and culture roles.

In this guide, we will refer to these professionals as 'Change Agents' because of their crucial role in guiding others to understand the need for change, fostering support for new initiatives, and addressing any resistance to these efforts in the workplace.



Using this guide

This guide is designed to be flexible and adaptive, providing support for Change Agents as they engage men in preventing violence against women within their workplaces.

This guide outlines three key steps:

01

Scoping opportunities and planning for action

02

Assessing your plan for meaningful action

03

Moving into action: Practical Examples

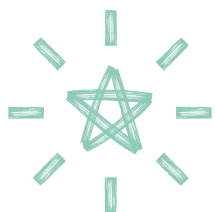
These steps will guide you through implementing evidence-based workplace initiatives aligned with best practices for sustainable cultural change. Whether you are beginning with small steps or leading larger efforts, this guide offers strategies to assess, adapt, and implement actions that promote a safer, more equitable workplace.

As this is an evolving area of practice, we encourage you to stay agile and regularly update your approach to align with new evidence and insights. While this guide can be useful when working independently, it is often more effective to form a working group that brings together diverse staff to plan and execute actions. Including women from various backgrounds in this group is essential, not only to bring in diverse perspectives but also to ensure that the process remains accountable to women and their experiences throughout the planning and implementation stages.

Organisations whose goal is to create safer workplaces by engaging men in the prevention of violence against women will find this guide particularly useful. The guide begins by outlining six guiding principles as the foundation on which all work on engaging men should be based. This is followed by practical steps to support workplaces: (a) scoping opportunities and planning for action, (b) assessing the plan for meaningful action and (c) practical examples for actions workplaces can take.

Engaging men in the prevention of violence against women in the workplace

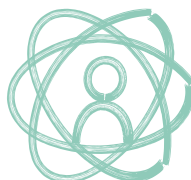
Guiding principles



Values based



Invitational communication



Intersectional



Whole of organisation



Ongoing and collaborative



Accountable

Practical steps

PART 1

Scoping opportunities and planning for action

- Understanding the current workplace culture
- Integration and alignment with existing workplace systems and practices
- Preparing Change Agents
- The critical role of leadership
- Creating your action plan for engaging men in the workplace

PART 2

Assessing your plan for meaningful action

- Use the provided tool to map your planned actions to the Our Watch Essential Actions and assess their effectiveness.

PART 3

Moving into action - Practical Examples

- Essential action 1 and examples
- Essential action 2 and examples
- Essential action 3 and examples
- Essential action 4 and examples
- Evaluation and next steps

Outcome: Engagement and cultural change

Introduction

Men's violence against women occurs in all communities, across every level of society, and within all cultures. While not all men use violence towards women, we know that every man plays an important role in ending it.

Women have long led the way in addressing gender inequality and preventing violence more broadly, and as such, there is a need for more men to engage in these efforts actively.

Workplaces are a crucial setting for the engagement of men in addressing gender equality and violence against women. This is due to the ways workplaces influence, shape, and reinforce cultural norms, attitudes and beliefs, particularly around gender. Additionally, workplaces offer numerous opportunities to engage men in preventing violence against women through direct and indirect avenues. This can include formal processes like sexual harassment training and education, as well as normalising practices like parental leave for all genders, both of which can promote gender equality if correctly aligned to the drivers of violence. Working towards gender equality benefits people of all genders by fostering safer, more inclusive environments where everyone can thrive, free from harmful power dynamics and discrimination.

Watch the interview (34s–1m 20s) **with Michael Flood speaking on the issue of workplace sexual harassment.**



Engaging men in the prevention of violence against women, including sexual harassment, within the workplace means inviting them into an ongoing, collaborative process where they are encouraged to critically reflect on their attitudes, behaviours and the workplace culture and practices around them and then to take appropriate actions to address gender inequality. Efforts to engage men should focus on supporting them to understand their role in promoting respect and equality, empowering them to challenge harmful norms and to actively contribute to a safer, more inclusive workplace environment and community. While stand-alone prevention initiatives and actions might be part of this process for your workplace, engaging men within your workplace also means taking an approach that centres self-reflection, equality and respect more broadly.

This guide aims to be pragmatic and supportive, offering practical strategies and guidance for those working towards creating meaningful change in their workplaces. It is designed to complement foundational resources like [*Men in focus: Practice guide*](#), RMIT's [*Working together with men 2.0*](#) and [*Men make a difference: Engaging men on gender equality*](#) building on their insights while providing additional tools for workplaces to engage men in gender equality and violence against women prevention efforts. By using this guide alongside these established resources, workplaces can foster more comprehensive and sustainable cultural change. The guide acknowledges the many constraints that professionals working toward change face and provides adaptable and practical approaches that recognise the unique cultures and dynamics of each organisation. The goal is to support organisational cultural change through everyday actions promoting gender equality by involving men as active participants in these efforts.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles provide a good practice framework to ensure that any actions or initiatives taken in the workplace are intentional, inclusive, and effective in preventing violence against women.

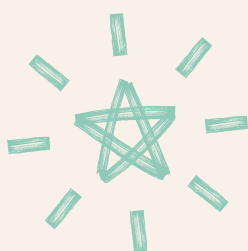
By keeping these principles in mind, you can foster genuine engagement with men, promote sustainable cultural change, and create a supportive environment for long-term impact.

Once your actions and initiatives have been framed using the guiding principles, the next step is to effectively communicate your proposed vision and actions across the workplace.

01

Values-based

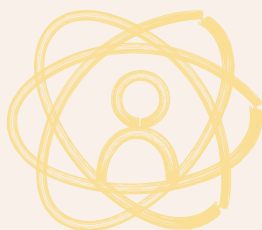
A values-based approach focuses on connecting with individuals' core beliefs, encouraging men to critically reflect on their personal values and ethics and how these align with respectful, inclusive behaviours. This internal reflection fosters meaningful, long-term change by promoting self-driven transformation, rather than relying on external pressure to change.



03

Intersectional

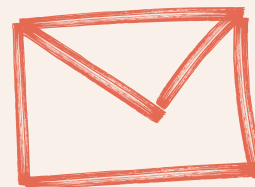
An intersectional approach recognises the diverse experiences of individuals and how intersecting forms of privilege and/or disadvantage shape their experiences. Ensure that your engagement actions are inclusive and address broader systems of inequality (sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia).

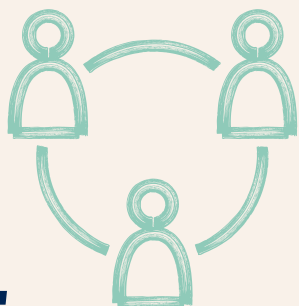


02

Invitational

Engaging men in the workplace through an invitational approach encourages open participation by modelling curiosity and creating a space for men to reflect on their behaviours without defensiveness. This approach fosters genuine commitment to change by inviting men to explore their roles in promoting respect and equality, rather than feeling pressured or judged. Mandatory attendance in workplace actions can still be used, but should apply to all staff, and the dynamic within those actions should still be invitational.

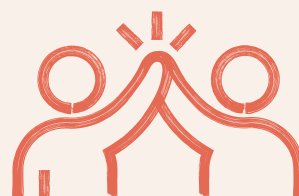




04

Whole of organisation

Involving all levels and facets of the organisation ensures that the responsibility for preventing violence and promoting equality is shared collectively. This creates a unified approach to cultural change. When leadership, management, and staff are all engaged, it strengthens accountability and embeds lasting change throughout the entire organisation.



05

Ongoing and collaborative

Change is not a one-time event but a continuous, shared process. It involves staff working together across the organisation, regularly reflecting on and adjusting their approaches. This ensures sustained engagement and collective responsibility for driving long-term cultural change and helping to embed prevention efforts into the fabric of the workplace.



06

Accountable

Measure the effectiveness of workplace actions through clear, data-driven outcomes that assess and report progress in preventing violence and promoting equality. This includes tracking both qualitative and quantitative data, such as changes in workplace culture, KPIs, and engagement surveys, to ensure ongoing efforts are transparent, measurable, and impactful. Accountability to women's voices and experiences should be an integral component of these processes.

Workplace communications

In all your endeavours to engage men in the prevention of violence against women in the workplace, it's crucial to be intentional with the language and framing of initiatives to encourage active participation. Use strengths-based, inclusive, invitational, and solutions-focused communication to reduce resistance and foster commitment.

Simply talking about 'engaging men' in the prevention of violence against women is not the same as actually involving men. **Genuine engagement requires intentional actions that invite men to actively participate in creating change**, not just conversations or ideas about their role.

There are various resources available to support effective communication and engagement with men in this important work, see:

>> *Vic Health: Framing masculinity message guide:* <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/VicHealth-Framing-masculinity-message-guide-2020.pdf>

>> *Vic Health: Framing gender equality Message guide:* <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Framing-gender-equality--Message-guide.pdf>

Key tips

- ✓ Use values-based messaging that appeals to core values, such as fairness, respect, and justice.
- ✓ Avoid blame and confrontation as they often incite resistance; instead, invite men to be part of the solution.
- ✓ Steer clear of messaging such as 'be a real man' that reinforces unhelpful traditional forms of masculinity.
- ✓ Promote collective responsibility, emphasising that preventing violence is a shared societal goal that benefits us all.
- ✓ Keep language solution-focused by offering actionable steps men can take to support gender equality.
- ✓ Maintain curiosity by balancing evidence with open dialogue about men's experiences and reflections. Model curiosity when responding to resistance and harmful attitudes and beliefs.

Scoping opportunities and planning for action

Your role as a Change Agent in seeking to engage men in the prevention of violence against women begins with understanding your workplace culture and context and carefully planning your approach.

This involves identifying the 'unwritten rules,' power dynamics, and gendered behaviours that shape daily interactions in your workplace environment. It also involves finding allies, such as male leaders, who can champion change. By reviewing staff engagement surveys, speaking with staff, and observing workplace dynamics, you can recognise and respond to both opportunities and challenges. It's important to align your efforts with existing initiatives, such as diversity programs or leadership training, to maximise their impact and avoid duplicating work. The guidance provided in the following sections will help you take these insights and translate them into effective, evidence-based actions that foster meaningful, long-term change.

Understanding the current workplace culture

Scoping the current workplace culture through a gender equality, safety, and respect lens allows Change Agents to uncover the 'unwritten rules' that shape daily interactions. This helps identify elements that support progress and entrenched norms or practices that may hinder meaningful change. Through a review of workplace data, such as cultural and safety surveys, speaking informally with staff, and observing meeting dynamics, Change Agents can gain insights into underlying power structures and behaviours. We encourage Change Agents to explore the following questions to create a 'snapshot' of your current workplace culture, which can be used in various ways moving forward. This includes guiding the development of new actions and initiatives that promote inclusivity and cultural transformation within the workplace.



Things to consider about how your workplace operates

1. What behaviours and attitudes are most rewarded or recognised in this workplace?

For example, is taking on excessive workloads and long hours praised as dedication? Are competition and rivalry normalised rather than collaboration and collegiality?

2. Who holds influence or power in shaping decisions, even informally?

For example, are senior male leaders or long-standing staff often guiding decisions, even outside of formal processes? Are workplace or team decision-making processes transparent, flexible and collaborative?

3. How are gender roles and expectations reflected in daily interactions and tasks?

For example, are gender-based assumptions made about certain roles or capabilities? Are administrative, cleaning and caring tasks allocated to women while men are given more roles with visible leadership, or those responsible for profit and loss?

4. What unspoken expectations exist about how people should behave, dress, or communicate?

For example, are women expected to wear makeup and dress formally, while men are not held to the same standard? Are women expected to be polite and accommodating in their communication, whereas men are allowed to be more assertive? Do those who dress outside of traditional gender expectations feel safe to do so in the workplace? Are they protected and supported?

5. To what extent are there any norms or practices that contradict the organisation's stated values of equality, respect, and safety?

For example, do male voices dominate meetings, or are bullying, gossip and inappropriate jokes tolerated, despite

a stated focus on equality? Are equal promotion and development opportunities afforded to all genders?

6. To what extent are there opportunities for people to safely challenge the status quo or suggest improvements?

For example, if there are suggestion boxes, do staff feel uncomfortable using them due to fear of backlash? Are reporting mechanisms visible, trusted and taken up by staff? Is feedback taken seriously, valued and actioned?

7. What current initiatives or practices could be leveraged or expanded to promote a more inclusive and respectful culture?

For example, could existing mentoring programs incorporate more focus on gender equality and inclusion? Could fundraising activities be focused on gendered issues, creating space for conversation?

8. How do leadership and staff demonstrate care and support for one another, and how might this be strengthened?

For example, are opportunities embedded in the workplace to recognise and appreciate the contribution of all staff? Does leadership model empathy and implement intentional practices to strengthen relationships, such as team-building activities?

9. What have staff surveys and other mechanisms told us in terms of workplace equality, safety, respect and standards of workplace behaviour?

For example, do surveys indicate that staff feel included in decision-making, but some report concerns about safety and respect, particularly around gender dynamics? Can we identify areas of disparity in staff perceptions of equality, safety and respect, including behavioural norms and practices?

Tip:

Here are some questions you can include in your staff surveys or staff focus groups to better understand staff perceptions of equality, safety and respect in your workplace.

All questions use a 'Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Don't know, Prefer not to say' scale).

Standard 1 - Commitment (Leadership)

- Our leaders (CEO, Board Members, Directors, and the Senior Leadership Team) set the tone by modelling inclusive leadership and being respectful in all interactions.

Standard 2 - Conditions

In my organisation:

- men are actively supported to take up flexible work arrangements
- men are actively supported to take up parental leave
- women are actively supported to take up flexible work arrangements
- women are actively supported to take up parental leave
- gender-diverse people are actively supported to take up flexible work arrangements
- gender-diverse people are actively supported to take up parental leave
- working part-time / taking up flexible work arrangements does not exclude staff from leadership opportunities
- taking up parental leave arrangements does not exclude staff from leadership opportunities.

Standard 3 - Culture

In my organisation:

- identifying as a woman is a barrier to success
- identifying as a man is a barrier to success
- identifying as gender diverse is a barrier to success.
- I am confident that in my organisation, there are consequences (people are held accountable) for engaging in disrespectful behaviours (e.g., sexist, racist, harassing behaviours) and/or violence.
- I feel confident in raising issues about gender inequality without fear of adverse consequences.
- The language and images used in communication materials (websites, brochures, emails, social media, etc.) do not stereotype men, women, or people of diverse gender identities.

Standard 4 - Support

- I have a good understanding of the procedures involved in making a complaint about sexual harassment in my workplace.
- I feel confident to report a complaint of sexual harassment in the workplace to my organisation.
- I feel confident that if I made a complaint about sexual harassment in the workplace, it would be promptly responded to in a sensitive and timely manner.



» For more support you can contact the Our Watch Workplaces team at equalityandrespect@ourwatch.org.au

Once you have gathered insights from these questions, analyse the data to identify key patterns, behaviours, and power dynamics that may support or hinder progress toward gender equality, safety, and respect. Use this information to pinpoint areas in need of change and begin brainstorming actionable steps. These findings will help you develop initiatives and interventions that align with your workplace's unique culture and drive meaningful transformation towards inclusivity and respect for all.

Integration and alignment with existing workplace systems and practices

Instead of reinventing the wheel with new initiatives, which might also be required, Change Agents can start to identify what is already working – existing actions, initiatives, or systems that can be reframed or redirected to focus on engaging men. This alignment with established workplace practice strengthens the impact of new actions.

By leveraging these opportunities, Change Agents can create more cohesive, sustainable change without isolating or fragmenting the work.

1. What current workplace initiatives or programs that focus on equality, safety, or inclusion could be expanded to engage men in preventing violence against women?

For example, is there a diversity and inclusion program that could include specific sessions on engaging men in gender equality? Or a safety committee that can broaden its focus to address respectful workplace relationships?

2. Are there any existing training programs, such as leadership or bystander action training, that could incorporate a stronger focus on engaging men in gender equality and violence prevention?

For example, could leadership training include modules on modelling respectful behaviour? Could bystander training highlight men's role in challenging harmful gender norms?

3. What workplace committees, networks, or staff groups (for example, diversity, well-being, or employee resource groups) might already align with cultural change efforts and could include a focus on men's engagement?

For example, could a diversity council invite male staff to champion gender equality? Or could a well-being committee focus on fostering respectful interactions and communication?

4. How can existing workplace policies (for example, harassment, bullying, or leave policies) be reframed to promote men's role in creating a safer, more inclusive environment?

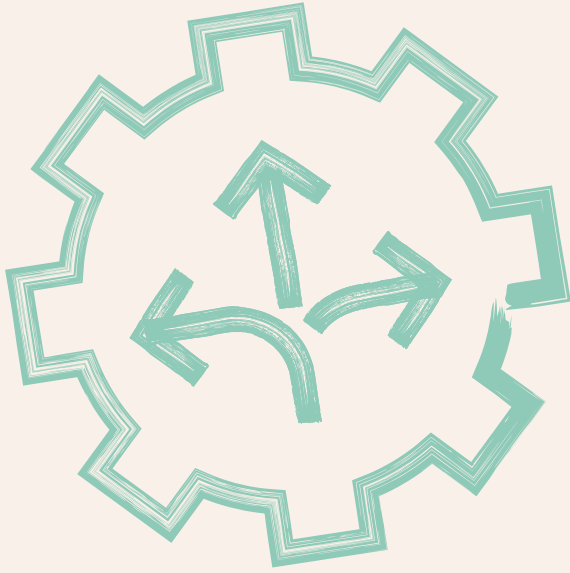
For example, could harassment policies be reframed to emphasise the responsibility of men in maintaining a respectful workplace? Could shared parental leave policies be promoted to encourage men's involvement at home and at work?

5. What informal practices, like team meetings or recognition programs, could be adapted to include conversations about men's involvement in fostering respect and equality?

For example, could there be regular team meetings where men are encouraged to discuss their role in supporting a respectful culture? Or recognition programs that acknowledge men who actively contribute to equality efforts?

6. What legislative requirements is the organisation already adhering to, and how can these be leveraged to support men's engagement in preventing violence and promoting gender equality?

For example, could Workplace Health and Safety policies be used to highlight how fostering a respectful and safe environment for all staff aligns with psycho-social safety obligations?



Preparing Change Agents

As Change Agents leading the work of engaging men to prevent violence against women in the workplace, it is essential to prioritise collective well-being and ongoing self-reflection throughout this journey. This work is deeply personal and can be both rewarding and emotionally challenging, making it crucial to remain mindful of how you communicate, navigate power dynamics, and handle conflict or resistance as a team. To do this work effectively, it's important to build supportive organisational structures, seek out professional development opportunities, and develop strategies for collective care.

Change Agents often encounter backlash or resistance and experiences with gender-based violence can heighten the risk of burnout or *vicarious trauma*. Vicarious trauma is trauma that occurs in response to exposure to the trauma of others. This can include listening to, reading about, or otherwise witnessing trauma such as gendered violence. This can potentially lead to distress and negative mental and physical health issues.

Ensuring as Change Agents, individually or as a group, you regularly reflect on your shared motivations, values and experiences will help maintain sustainability and authenticity in your work.

Here are six reflective questions to guide Change Agents in preparing to engage men in preventing violence against women, and to identify areas for collective growth or professional development.

1. What shared motivations and values drive our work in engaging men to prevent violence, and how do they influence our approach? What support might be needed?

For example: *'We're driven by a belief in equality, but when met with resistance, our approach sometimes becomes reactive or we lose hope. We might seek training on handling resistance constructively.'*

2. How comfortable are we as a team in navigating power dynamics and conflict, and what support or skills might we need to improve this?

For example: *'We sometimes struggle to challenge leadership in tense discussions. We could benefit from discussing this with a mentor, manager or mediator to build confidence.'*

3. How do we manage emotional challenges, such as backlash or resistance, and what collective strategies can we use to maintain our well-being?

For example: *'We often feel exhausted by dismissive colleagues and could improve our debriefing practices or establish peer support networks to avoid burnout.'*

4. How do we ensure the safety and well-being of our team, and do we have regular debriefing sessions in place to support this?

For example: *'We've experienced emotional challenges but don't debrief regularly as a team. We could establish routine debrief sessions to ensure everyone feels supported.'*

5. What gaps exist in our knowledge or skills related to gender equality and violence prevention, and how can we collectively pursue professional development to strengthen these areas?

For example: *'We're confident in gender equality concepts but less experienced in engaging men from diverse backgrounds. We should seek training focused on intersectionality.'*

6. How often do we take time to reflect on our own biases, assumptions, and experiences, and how might they impact our ability to engage men authentically in this work?

For example: *'We haven't reflected on our biases recently, and we realise our assumptions about how men will respond may affect our approach. We could schedule regular reflection sessions to stay open and unbiased.'*

This ensures that the well-being and safety of Change Agents is a priority, with a focus on regular debriefing to maintain mental and emotional health.

Resource

» Part 3 of Our Watch's [*Men in focus: Practice guide*](#) provides you with practical tips on:

- preparing yourself to do this work
- determining your audience's preparedness to do this work
- building sustainability into your design.

The critical role of leadership

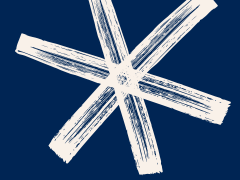
Leadership commitment, especially from male leaders, is essential in fostering cultural change and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women. Leaders who model caring, respectful, and equitable behaviours, set a powerful example for the entire organisation.

Male leaders play a unique role in challenging traditional gender norms by actively demonstrating values of equality and inclusion.

- Their visible commitment shows that gender equality is not just a policy but a lived practice.
- They promote an environment where other men feel more encouraged to engage in individual and organisational change, knowing they won't face negative consequences for speaking out or for challenging harmful norms.
- Their strong leadership commitment means efforts to engage men are better supported and integrated into the organisation's fabric, leading to sustainable, long-term cultural transformation.

Watch the interview (3m 23s–4m 16s) with Michael Flood speaking on the issue of workplace sexual harassment.





Tip:

For Change Agents looking to get their leadership on board with engaging men in preventing violence against women, the following tips can help guide your approach. Even without much influence, you can use these strategies to highlight the importance of leadership's role in fostering cultural change.

1. Frame the conversation around values

Instead of 'selling' a focus on gender equality, highlight to leadership the alignment this approach and associated initiatives can have with your workplace's core values. Bring their focus to the role it can have in providing the foundation for long-term organisational success. Highlight that by engaging men in gender equality efforts, leadership not only foster a more inclusive and equitable workplace but can also strengthen overall organisational success through improved staff morale, higher retention rates, and a more positive workplace culture.

2. Use data and evidence

Present data showing the benefits of gender equality initiatives, such as improved morale, reduced turnover, and compliance with legislative or safety standards, to reinforce the importance of leadership engagement. You can find this sort of information at the [Workplace Gender Equality Agency](#).

3. Start with small, strategic wins

Suggest manageable initiatives, like a leadership-endorsed training or internal campaigns, to show the impact of male leadership involvement and build momentum for larger efforts.

4. Highlight the role of leadership

Emphasise that male leaders can shape workplace culture and act as role models in promoting gender equality while ensuring their involvement supports and amplifies women's voices and leadership without overshadowing them.

5. Create safe spaces for discussion

Encourage leaders to engage in reflective conversations about gender equality through workshops or meetings, helping them explore their experiences and assumptions in a safe environment.

6. Encourage ongoing learning

Recommend that male leaders seek professional development, training and support in inclusive leadership and violence prevention, so they can model caring, respectful behaviours.

7. Engage allies and build coalitions

Find logical allies within and outside the organisation to help amplify your message and strengthen your case for leadership involvement.

These strategies can help you effectively engage male leaders, ensuring they play a key role in promoting a more inclusive and respectful workplace.

Creating your action plan for engaging men in the workplace

Now that you've explored the importance of leadership, assessed your workplace culture and what is working, and reflected on your personal motivations and readiness, it's time to develop a concrete action plan. This plan will help you translate what you've learned into meaningful steps for engaging men in preventing violence against women. The following questions are designed to guide you in creating actionable strategies that align with your workplace context, your leadership's commitment, and your own capacity for this work.

By outlining clear goals, identifying opportunities, and considering potential challenges, you can take intentional steps towards fostering a more respectful and inclusive workplace.

By answering these questions and developing your action plan, you will be equipped to take meaningful steps toward engaging men in preventing violence against women in your workplace. Start with small, achievable goals, and build momentum as you embed these actions into your organisation's culture. Regular reflection and evaluation will ensure that your efforts are sustainable, impactful, and aligned with your overall goals for cultural change.

Reflective questions for developing your action plan

- 1. What specific actions can we take to engage male leaders and staff in supporting violence prevention efforts in our workplace?**
For example, can we propose a leadership workshop? Or develop a campaign encouraging male role models to promote gender equality?
- 2. How can we leverage existing workplace initiatives, policies, or informal practices to align with gender equality and engage men?**
For example, can we use an existing diversity program to incorporate discussions on masculinity and violence prevention?
- 3. What are our immediate goals for engaging men, and what small, measurable actions can we take to start implementing these?**
For example, can we set a goal to have men in leadership co-facilitate one gender equality training session by the end of the quarter?
- 4. What challenges or resistance might we face, and how can we prepare to navigate these obstacles effectively?**
For example, can we identify potential backlash from staff and plan to address it with open dialogue and strong leadership backing?
- 5. How will we measure success and track progress in engaging men and creating cultural change?**
For example, can we regularly survey staff on attitudes toward gender equality and track participation rates in relevant programs?

Navigating resistance and backlash

The creation of new cultures and narratives through workplace social change initiatives challenges established norms, beliefs and practices. Resistance and pushback, both individual and at an organisational level, are inevitable and should be anticipated. Change Agents doing this work need to put in place strategies and resources to respond to expected resistance. This includes preparing to navigate workplace conversations about violence prevention work. Resistance can look like:

- inaction, silence or distancing from the work
- actions or structures that aim to stop, reverse or minimise workplace gender equality
- organisational roadblocks
- inadequate resourcing.

Further guidance

- »» Our Watch's [Resistance and backlash in primary prevention of violence against women](#)
- »» Vic Health's [\(En\)countering Resistance](#)
- »» Our Watch's [Men in focus: Practice guide](#)



Assessing your plan for meaningful action

The assessment phase is essential to ensure your planned actions are designed to *meaningfully* engage men in preventing violence against women within the workplace.

It's about more than just moving from planning to action – it's about making sure your initiatives are grounded in evidence and aligned with proven strategies for cultural change.

When we say *meaningful*, we suggest that you should be able to map and explain how your action/s directly addresses the Our Watch drivers of violence. This can be done by aligning your actions with the associated essential actions within our national framework *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*. By assessing thoroughly, you set your efforts up for long-term success, ensuring they foster real change while addressing potential challenges.

The *Change the story* framework outlines the four key drivers of violence against women which are rooted in gender inequality. It also provides clear, essential actions to prevent violence.

When assessing your workplace actions, consider whether they align with these essential actions, which target the deep-seated norms, practices, and structures that contribute to gendered violence.

Simple awareness-raising activities, like morning teas, may help initiate conversations but are unlikely to create the structural or behavioural change necessary to challenge the drivers of violence.



Driver 1

Excusing or minimising violence

In workplaces, the first driver of violence against women (including sexual harassment) is excusing or minimising violence against women and sexual harassment (for example, dismissing women's experiences of sexual harassment, or making sexually suggestive comments, or telling jokes that intimidate or offend), or trying to justify why the violence occurred.

So, what can you do to address this driver? >

Essential action

Challenge sexism in the workplace

Encourage and empower staff to take active bystander action by calling out and addressing sexist remarks, behaviours, or jokes. This can be done through training that equips staff with practical strategies for intervening safely and effectively. This in turn fosters a workplace culture where everyone feels a sense of personal and shared responsibility for challenging sexism and supporting respectful behaviours.

Driver 2

Gender inequality

Gender inequality in workplaces results in men dominating decision-making (for example, gender pay gaps, lack of women in leadership, lack of respect for women, including women from marginalised groups).

To address this driver, it is essential to take the following action. >

Essential action

Promote inclusive gender equality, safety, and respect

All staff and leaders can champion gender equality by publicly committing to inclusive decision-making processes, addressing gender pay gaps, and ensuring that respect for women is prioritised in all aspects of workplace culture. Part of this is leaders being open to hearing feedback from staff when this might not be the case. This type of leadership sets a strong example and reinforces the importance of shared responsibility in creating a more equitable workplace.

Driver 3

Rigid gender stereotyping

Rigid gender stereotyping limits the ways people can express themselves and reinforces harmful assumptions about how people behave and what roles they should occupy. For men, rigid attachments to traditional ideas of masculinity – such as needing to appear dominant, unemotional, or competitive – can limit their ability to express vulnerability, collaborate with women as equals, or engage in roles typically seen as ‘feminine,’ like caregiving. These stereotypes not only restrict individual potential but also perpetuate unequal power dynamics, fostering environments where gender inequality thrives.

Challenging these norms is crucial to creating a safer, more inclusive workplace for all genders. >

Essential action

Challenge gender stereotyping

Encourage men to take active roles in challenging gender stereotypes by promoting gender-equitable domestic and parenting practices. Men in the workplace can lead by example, taking parental leave, participating in flexible work arrangements, and advocating for inclusive workplace policies that support all staff in balancing professional and caregiving roles. Additionally, encouraging men to use and promote inclusive language and behaviours helps shift cultural norms and creates a more supportive and equitable environment for everyone.

Driver 4

Male peer relationships that disrespect women

Male peer relations at work that disrespect women and each other include things like ‘locker-room talk’, unwanted touching, or sexual gestures, readily excusing a peer’s disrespectful behaviour, and men being discouraged from taking a stand because they fear rejection by their peers. There are things that can be done to address this driver too.

Let’s look at another essential action that can be taken. >

Essential action

Support and engage men to promote positive masculinities and supportive male peer relationships in workplaces

Encourage men to take on active role modelling by demonstrating care, respect, and support for colleagues and guests. Implement programs or discussions that challenge traditional expectations of men, emphasising that showing kindness, empathy, and vulnerability are strengths, not weaknesses. Leaders can set the tone by highlighting positive male behaviours, such as collaboration, fairness, and allyship, helping to shift the workplace culture towards one that values these traits. This approach encourages men to embrace and embody more expansive and supportive masculinities, fostering an environment of respect and accountability.

To help you map and explain how your action/s directly addresses the drivers of violence, we have developed a *Workplace Action Assessment Tool*. This tool enables you to self-assess your proposed actions by aligning them with the core elements of the *Change the story* framework. The tool will help you critically assess whether to start, stop, or continue specific projects, activities, or campaigns. Grounding your workplace actions in evidence sets your team on a shared path with others working to prevent and end gendered violence, and makes certain that your initiatives contribute to sustainable, systemic cultural transformation.

By using this assessment tool, you can ensure your actions go beyond surface-level engagement and are instead part of a broader, evidence-based effort to foster meaningful, long-term change.

Taking this step ensures that your workplace is contributing to the larger societal movement to prevent violence against women by addressing its root causes. This assessment phase is essential for translating your plans into impactful, sustained actions that engage men in ways that truly make a difference.

Ask yourself the questions about your proposed actions. Once you have completed the action assessment, tally up your score and reflect on how well it aligns with the core elements of the *Change the story* framework.

Your project can score between 0 and 8 points, with higher scores indicating stronger alignment with the Our Watch evidence base. While there are no strict rules for starting or stopping a project, this tool offers a helpful starting point for evaluating your workplace's efforts to drive change.

If your score is below 4, revisiting the planning phase and further developing and incorporating aspects of the Our Watch essential actions into your project may be beneficial.



Workplace Action Assessment Tool

Criterion	Y/N	Justification (please explain how)
Does this proposed action challenge sexism or the minimisation of violence against women?		
Does this proposed action promote inclusive gender equality, safety, and respect?		
Does this proposed action challenge gender stereotyping?		
Does this proposed action support and engage men to promote positive masculinities and supportive male peer relationships in workplaces?		
Does this proposed action take an intersectional approach – does it attempt to address multiple forms of inequality and privilege: sexism, racism, homophobia?		
Does this proposed action connect with other elements of your organisational values, strategies or safety requirements?		
Does this proposed action take an invitational and values-based approach?		
Does this proposed action amplify women and gender-diverse people's voices and experiences?		

Score: 'Y' = 1 point, 'N' = 0 points.

Your score

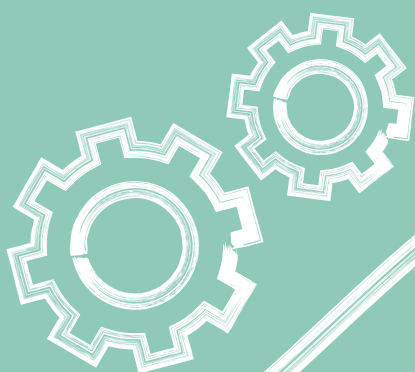
Moving into action: Practical examples

The action phase is where your plans take shape and become tangible efforts to engage men in preventing violence against women in the workplace.

After careful planning and thorough assessment, this step involves putting your strategies into action, actively engaging with participants, and creating meaningful change. Action involves applying what you have prepared and being responsive to real-time feedback, ensuring that your initiatives remain adaptable and effective.

Here, your commitment and preparation transform into concrete steps that drive lasting cultural change.

This guide offers practical, evidence-based ideas that you can implement in your workplace to engage men meaningfully in violence prevention. Below are examples of workplace actions that align with Our Watch's four essential actions, designed to challenge harmful norms, promote gender equality, and support men in adopting more positive and inclusive roles in the workplace. Each action has a tip to tailor it to engage men specifically. You may choose to include some of these suggestions in your plan.



Action 1:

Challenge sexism in the workplace

Bystander intervention workshops

Provide staff training on recognising and safely intervening when witnessing sexist behaviours or attitudes. These workshops can focus on real-life workplace scenarios.

» **Tip:** When engaging a training provider to deliver this type of training in your workplace, ask the providers if the workshop is intersectional, what evidence base it uses, and if it works to address drivers of violence against women (including sexual harassment).

Internal campaigns

Launch a communications campaign within the workplace that uses posters, emails, screensavers, blogs on your intranet, and/or presentations to highlight the ways in which sexism perpetuates harm. This can include statistics, facts, and stories that challenge sexism in the workplace.

» **Tip:** Some workplaces have used data from the annual workplace culture survey to highlight how a majority of staff are opposed to sexism and, more broadly, violence against women. This can be placed in men's bathrooms or communal areas or digitally shared with staff.

» **Tip:** Invite and incorporate men's stories and voices as key components of internal communications campaigns.

» **Tip:** Run a focused campaign encouraging men to speak up when they hear sexist language and call others out when they use it. Encourage men to step in and clarify that they don't support sexist language or jokes and why it's inappropriate. [Learn more in this interview](#) (1m 13s–3m 02s) with Michael Flood.

Create anonymous reporting options

Implement or promote an anonymous reporting system where staff can safely report instances of sexist behaviour, creating a space for accountability without fear of retaliation. This includes men reporting as active bystanders.

» **Tip:** Staff must feel confident that their identity will remain protected and that their report will be handled with care, free from retaliation or exposure. To build this trust, the organisation should communicate how the anonymous reporting process works, how they protect reporters' identities, and how the information will address issues effectively. Communication could also address specific barriers that men may have in engaging with the process.

» **Tip:** Skill the relevant staff within the organisation to receive anonymous reports of sexist behaviour. Develop a consistent and values-aligned approach to respond as an organisation.



Action 2:

Promote inclusive gender equality, safety, and respect

Inclusive meeting practices

Ensure that meetings and discussions provide equal opportunities for all voices to be heard. Actively invite input from women, especially in decision-making processes, to encourage diverse perspectives.

» **Tip:** Ensure traditionally gendered tasks in meetings, such as chairing/facilitating and note/minute keeping, are shared among staff of different genders.

» **Tip:** Embed processes that invite men to reflect on the gender dynamics of meetings they attend across the organisation. This could include reflections on who takes on administrative tasks associated with the meeting, participation in the discussion, interruptions, and the physical space of the meeting.

» **Tip:** The [Diversity Council of Australia](#) recommends implementing the Plus One Pledge, in which men at all levels pledge to add at least one woman to their team when roles become available.

Normalise parental leave for all genders

In internal communications, such as newsletters or team meetings, highlight stories of staff of all genders who have taken parental leave. Showcasing these examples helps to normalise the take-up of parental leave and communicates that the organisation supports and values it.

» **Tip:** Encourage male leaders and managers to take parental leave themselves and to speak openly about their experiences with their teams. When men in leadership roles take leave, it sets a powerful example and signals that it's acceptable and encouraged.

» **Tip:** Use resources developed by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's *Equilibrium Man* campaign.

Offer professional development and mentoring programs

Provide access to training, workshops, and courses that enhance skills and knowledge, empowering women to take on leadership and decision-making roles both within the workplace and in their personal lives. You can also access mentoring for men in inclusive and equitable leadership.

» **Tip:** While all staff require professional development, staff needs may differ. Ensure programs offer a range of mentors or topics so that people of all genders can continue developing themselves.

» **Tip:** Consider women and gender-diverse mentors for male mentees in the workplace.

» **Tip:** Sponsorship is a powerful way to support women in elevating their careers and moving into leadership roles. You can learn more about sponsorship here: [Champions of Change's *Sponsorship track*](#).

Support mechanisms

Provide access to resources and support systems to ensure staff have clear health, wellbeing and allyship pathways for workplace gender equality, safety and respect. This encourages a culture of care and respect, making it easier for staff to speak up about issues related to safety and inclusivity.

» **Tip:** Encourage men to prioritise their emotional and psychological well-being by actively engaging with available support systems, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), if they need help. Normalising the use of these resources fosters a culture where men feel comfortable seeking support, strengthening their ability to contribute positively to workplace gender equality, safety, and respect.

You could also publish the usage/access rates of your EAP or similar supports to add transparency on its usage.

Policy development

Include diverse staff in policy development, consultation and review. Intentionally undertake such processes with a lens of inclusive gender equality, safety and respect, bringing diverse perspectives and experiences to internal workplace practices.

» **Tip:** Involve men in implementing new policies and processes to ensure they fully understand changes and see their relevance and importance. This engagement helps men feel a sense of ownership and ensures that policies on gender equality, safety, and respect are meaningful and effective in shaping workplace culture.

Action 3:

Challenge gender stereotyping

Educate and train

Offer regular training sessions addressing unconscious bias, preventing violence against women, and the importance of inclusivity in the workplace. Use these sessions to educate staff on how gender stereotypes can limit personal identities and relationships and how to support a more open, accepting and diverse workplace culture.

» **Tip:** Integrate discussions on gender and gender inequality into mandatory workplace training events like sexual harassment and bullying training. Normalise acknowledging and addressing gender dynamics and patterns within the workplace.

» **Tip:** Explore setting up allyship initiatives where staff are introduced to the practice of allyship and supported with follow-up

discussions to provide the support they need to put authentic allyship into action.

» **Tip:** Commit to the *Panel Pledge*, where before participating in events that require a speaking engagement, you ask the organiser about their efforts to ensure female and gender-diverse leaders are represented and how gender balance will be achieved.

Inclusive dress codes

Implement and enforce flexible and gender-neutral dress codes and, if relevant, uniform options. This will allow staff to dress authentically rather than conform to traditional gender norms, reducing biases that arise from appearances and fostering a more equitable and less alienating work environment. Gender-neutral clothing avoids what is traditionally considered hyper-masculine or hyper-feminine elements.

» **Tip:** Organise company-wide forums or anonymous surveys to collect staff input on the current dress code or uniform options. This can help identify areas where the policy may feel exclusionary and gather suggestions for improvement. Example: Many airlines now allow flight crews to wear options across the uniform catalogue (including skirts or pants for any gender).

Promote work-life balance for all

Encourage all staff, regardless of gender, to take advantage of work-life balance initiatives such as flexible hours, parental leave, and mental health days. Normalise that all individuals, not just women, have caregiving responsibilities and personal interests outside of work.

» **Tip:** Actively promote flexible work arrangements by inviting men to consider how they might utilise available flexibility to balance work with their caring or responsibilities.

» **Example:** One large automotive manufacturer made taking the maximum paid parental leave (for whoever had a child coming into their family) the default and requires staff

to actively put a business case to their manager as to why they shouldn't take it. This resulted in a rapid increase in men taking parental leave. Making the desired behaviour the default and putting up barriers to deviating from it markedly increases uptake. Make your desired behaviours opt-out rather than opt-in.

» **Tip:** The Diversity Council of Australia recommends implementing '[Men and work](#)' programs. Men and work is an innovative, evidence-based program designed for men in the workplace. It provides a fresh approach to examining the key challenges men experience today, including negotiating work and personal/family lives, achieving health and well-being, having satisfying close relationships, and being an effective father and mentor.

Inclusive language

Promote inclusive language by encouraging staff and leaders to share their pronouns and avoid gendered terms. This small step sets a respectful tone that fosters inclusivity and demonstrates that all identities are welcomed and respected in the workplace.

» **Tip:** Replace gendered terms like 'manpower' or 'chairman' with alternatives such as 'teamwork' or 'chairperson'. Incorporate practices like adding pronouns to email signatures and forms to ensure all identities are respected and valued.

» **Tip:** Support male leaders and managers in adopting inclusive and non-gendered language in all aspects of their work, including internal and external meetings, reports, and communications. Invite them to understand how these actions align with organisational values of inclusion, belonging, and safety.

» **Tip:** Use the Diversity Council of Australia's [Words at work guide](#) to support staff to call out / call in non-inclusive language.

Encourage caring masculinities

When men are encouraged and supported to perform every day caring actions, such as checking in on colleagues, asking how someone is doing, or suggesting a coffee chat when a coworker seems stressed, it fosters a more compassionate work environment.

» **Tip:** Encourage and guide men to participate in celebrating team milestones, like organising birthday cakes, writing cards, or preparing farewell gifts. This helps strengthen team bonds and promote a sense of belonging. By normalising these small actions, such as offering guests coffee or water, men can recognise the value of contributing to a more inclusive, supportive, and gender-equitable workplace.

» **Tip:** The Diversity Council of Australia recommends implementing '[Staying connected](#)' programs. This work-based program, designed in partnership with the Australian Government's Child Support Agency, aims to engage men who have recently experienced divorce and/or separation. It focuses on men's physical and mental well-being, staying connected with their children, and developing and maintaining effective relationships with their former partners.

Action 4:

Support and engage men to promote positive masculinities and supportive male peer relationships in workplace

Promote positive role models

Highlight male role models who demonstrate empathy, collaboration, and respect in the workplace. Share stories of men who challenge traditional stereotypes and embody a healthy, inclusive approach to masculinity.

» **Tip:** Be careful not to place men on a pedestal for working in ways that women have for years, often without thanks or acknowledgement.

» **Tip:** Invite men to consider ways to lead by example in creating a safe and equal workplace by modelling and embodying allyship in their everyday work practices and relationships.

Encourage emotional expression

Normalise expressing emotions for all staff, including men. Encourage a culture where men can talk about their feelings, seek support, and express vulnerability without fear of judgment or ridicule.

» **Tip:** Male leaders encouraging, promoting, and sharing how they have used the Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) can be a great way to do this.

» **Tip:** Offer training on emotional intelligence to help everyone in the workplace, especially men, understand the importance of emotional expression.

Promote positive peer relationships

Highlight the importance of supportive male friendships. Organise activities that build camaraderie, such as team-building exercises, community service projects, or informal social gatherings that emphasise connection rather than competition (and without the use of alcohol).

» **Tip:** Use our Workplace Action Assessment Tool to assess general workplace staff activities, parties or events that could be improved. (see pg. 24)

» **Tip:** Encourage cross-gender dialogue and create space for people to talk about their experiences of gender. Model curiosity and ask questions about harmful attitudes and behaviours when they arise.

Model healthy behaviour at leadership levels

Encourage male leaders to model healthy masculinities by openly displaying empathy, respect, humility and collaboration. Leaders can set the tone by actively promoting gender equality, showing emotional intelligence, and supporting work-life balance.

» **Tip:** Create men's leadership groups where male leaders can share personal experiences and challenges.

Mentoring programs for male allies

Foster and promote mentoring programs as an important mechanism for promoting allyship, creating opportunities for accountability, and fostering emotional intelligence, vulnerability, and empathy with experienced male mentors.

» **Tip:** Ensure emotional intelligence, communication skills and constructive ways to navigate conflict are embedded into the frameworks of mentoring programs.

Peer support networks

Facilitate the creation of peer support groups and networks in the workplace to bring men from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and roles together, allowing for a healthy exchange of ideas, resources, and skill sharing among peers. Official peer networking opportunities may also enhance relationships, showcase an understanding of different masculinities and act as a platform for advocacy and solidarity.


» **Tip:** Establish a monthly peer support lunch or coffee catch-up. This informal, recurring event can be open to all male staff, with rotating facilitators (including women) or topics focusing on different aspects of gender, masculinities, and workplace dynamics.

Evaluation

Establishing a robust evaluation plan before implementing your action plan is essential to ensuring your efforts to engage men in preventing violence against women in the workplace are effective and sustainable.

Evaluation not only allows you to measure the impact of your initiatives and track progress but also helps build the evidence base for this evolving field of practice. With limited comprehensive evaluations of prevention initiatives focused on engaging men, particularly in Australia, your evaluation could contribute valuable insights for future projects.

By reflecting on your challenges and successes, your evaluation can help deepen the understanding of how initiatives aimed at engaging men contribute to preventing violence against women while ensuring that your workplace is on a sustainable path toward meaningful cultural change.



Here are some high-level tips for evaluating your initiative:

- **Set clear, measurable goals** that align with your action plan, such as increased participation in gender equality discussions or shifts in workplace attitudes.
- **Use both qualitative and quantitative methods** to gather feedback, including surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews, ensuring diverse perspectives are captured meaningfully.
- **Regularly review and adapt** your approach based on real-time feedback, focusing on long-term transformation rather than short-term appearance of change.
- **Collaborate with key stakeholders** when developing your evaluation plan. Clarify the short and medium-term changes your initiative aims to achieve and the resources and support you will need.
- **Evaluate continuously** by incorporating feedback loops throughout implementation. This will allow you to adjust strategies and strengthen your initiative as it progresses.

Further resources to support your evaluation

- » [Evaluating Victorian projects for the primary prevention of violence against women: A concise guide](#) by VicHealth with tools, templates, worksheets and an online program logic model builder.
- » [Evaluating prevention activity](#) by Safe and Equal.
- » [Indigenous data sovereignty: principles](#) by Maïam Nayari Wingara.

Conclusion

Engaging and empowering men as active violence prevention allies in the workplace requires an ongoing commitment to fostering a culture that values respect, equality, and healthy interpersonal relationships. Organisations can create meaningful and lasting change that benefits everyone by following the planning, assessment, and actions outlined in this guide.

However, this is just the beginning. The work of engaging men in the prevention of violence against women is an evolving field that continues to grow as new evidence, practices, and insights emerge. We encourage workplaces to critically reflect on the processes outlined in this guide and stay agile in adapting to new knowledge. This includes regularly reviewing your initiatives, gathering feedback, and incorporating the lessons learned into future actions.

Collaborating with specialist organisations and consulting evidence based resources is essential to ensure your efforts align with best practices. Make space for diverse voices, especially those from marginalised communities, whose lived experiences can provide invaluable insights into building inclusive and effective approaches.

As this work progresses, your organisation's commitment to creating safer, more equitable workplaces must remain responsive, reflective, and open to ongoing development. By engaging in this iterative process and fostering continuous learning, your workplace can contribute to the broader movement towards gender equality and violence prevention.



ourwatch.org.au

**Our
Watch**



**Preventing violence
against women**