

**Acknowledgements**

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge.

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# Introduction

This guide provides an overview of preparing for employee focus groups and describes the process.

Employee focus groups give people in your organisation an opportunity to reflect on your organisation’s engagement with the five [*Workplace Equality and Respect Standards*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/). Canvassing ideas on what is working (or not) and ideas for doing this better also helps build ownership for the change process you are undertaking. The employee focus groups will help you to determine a starting point for your gender equality work and identify the best places to concentrate your efforts.

If you have reached this stage, the assumption is that you have completed a readiness assessment and have a project plan where critical decisions have been made regarding employee focus groups.

If you want to facilitate employee focus groups and need more support, email equalityandrespect@ourwatch.org.au for more guidance. We can also support you with all your benchmarking and diagnostics and action planning steps.

## ****A quick recap checklist:****

[ ]  Senior executives have approved and committed to supporting the rollout of workplace equality and respect and this has been communicated to all employees.

[ ]  A cross-organisation Project Management Group (PMG) has been established.

[ ]  A readiness assessment has been completed, and gaps (if any) in systems and procedures to respond appropriately to disclosures of violence from employees have been addressed.

[ ]  The first iteration of the organisational snapshot is ready and has been/will be shared with employees before the focus group/s.

## ****Checklist of critical decisions**** on ****employee focus groups:****

[ ]  Decision made on whether the focus groups will be conducted internally or by external facilitators.

**TIP:** Internal/external facilitators must have expertise in rolling out Workplace Equality and Respect employee focus groups or similar organisational culture change processes, facilitating small group discussions and a solid understanding of the links between gender inequality and violence against women, and be well prepared to address resistance/backlash.

[ ]  Internal/external facilitators have access to the organisational snapshot, which includes analysis of the [*Workplace gender equality indicators*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/), information from the organisation’s people survey and/or the [*People survey tool*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/) and analysis undertaken by the PMG.

[ ]  Decision made regarding how many focus groups will be held and how many people will participate in each focus group – ensuring cross-organisational representation as well as representation across gender, age, race, ethnicity, and ability across all levels of the organisation.

**TIP:** Robust evidence would require engaging 30% to 40% of employees. This might be challenging depending on the size of the organisation, so the PMG needs to discuss what is reasonable with internal/external expert facilitators. It is recommended that focus group numbers be limited to 20 people per group from across the organisation.

[ ]  Decision made on whether the employee focus groups will be held face-to-face or online.

**TIPS:** Face-to-face and online modes of engagement require different resources and facilitation skills.

[ ]  Logistics (time/venue/scribes and so on) to hold the employee focus groups have been confirmed.

**TIPS:** It takes half a day (for each focus group) to discuss all the five *Workplace Equality and Respect Standards*. The focus group sessions can be held in one block of time with appropriate breaks or split across sessions (e.g., two blocks of two hours each). You will need to add an hour to the total time if foundational training on the drivers of violence against women has not been provided.

[ ]  Employees have been invited to participate. They have received foundational training on the drivers of violence against women and have the relevant information they need to meaningfully contribute to discussions.

**TIPS:** Communications regarding participation should come from senior executives to emphasise commitment and support. These should include the agenda, any pre-reading/thinking required, what to expect from the process and so on. Since the time commitment could be considered significant, there may be a need to secure the support of immediate managers to release employees to participate in the focus groups.

[ ]  Post-session communication has been planned.

# How the process works

Employee focus groups systematically explore the five [*Workplace Equality and Respect* *Standards*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/). If foundational training on the drivers of violence against women has not been provided, the focus groups begin with this training. After briefly discussing the focus group’s purpose, discussions begin on the standards.

We recommend focussing on one standard at a time and following the process until all five standards have been discussed. The process looks like this:

1. present findings from the organisational snapshot
2. present the standard (see Table 3) and ask participants to rate it on a scale of 1– 4 (see Table 1). See Table 2 for how to interpret the scores
3. discuss reasons behind the ratings – what’s working and what can be improved
4. ask participants to prioritise actions for improvement.

**Table 1:** How to score the organisation’s performance in the *Employee focus group discussion template* (see Table 3)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Definition** |
| **1** | There is no evidence of this practice or behaviour. |
| **2** | There is some evidence of this practice or behaviour being applied sometimes. |
| **3** | There is some evidence of this practice or behaviour being applied consistently. |
| **4** | There is extensive and consistent evidence of this practice or behaviour. |

**Table 2:** How to interpret the *Employee focus group discussion template* score.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Rating** | **Meaning** |
| **1 – 2** | This is an area of weakness and needs attention |
| **2.1 – 3** | Some progress is being made and can be strengthened |
| **3.1 – 4** | This is an area of strength, good work is being done, it should be continued, and the organisation can further build on its work |

## Standards 1 to 3 (Commitment, Conditions and Culture)

The participants are presented with the findings from the organisational snapshot. Following the presentation, the participants are asked to individually rate how the organisation is performing on the standard (see Table 1).

It is important to let the participants know that the scores are meant to be a conversation starter and will only be used for the purpose of the current discussion. The scores will not be used to compare their work to others or reported outside the organisation.

We must acknowledge that we ask focus group participants for their perceptions/opinions and that the scores they give reflect their experiences in the workplace and what has been presented in the organisational snapshot. There is no external benchmark against which you can compare the scores.

Once all participants have completed their scoring, a facilitated discussion follows on the reasons behind the scores, eliciting information on what has been done, what needs improvement and recommended actions.

There is a great deal of flexibility in how this discussion is held. Each criterion can be discussed. Alternatively, an average score for the standard (adding the scores for each criterion and dividing by the number of participants) can be quickly calculated. The standard should be discussed as a whole – what has been done, what needs improvement and recommended actions.

The group could be asked to prioritise actions suggested for improvement by ranking their suggestions once they have been brainstormed. Interactive online tools like Slido, Ahaslides, Mentimeter or Miro can help make these activities more engaging.

The [*Employee focus group discussion template*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/) is used to record the discussions.

## Standards 4 and 5 (Support and Core Business)

The discussion on these standards follows a slightly different format and may not need as much time for discussion as standards 1 to 3.

The Project Management Group (PMG), in its assessment, will have already investigated Standard 4 (Support) in some detail. The [*People survey*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/) will also capture how well the organisation supports employees who experience sexual harassment and domestic and family violence. The employee focus group could be used to validate findings to date. We recommend sharing what you have discovered about your organisational performance on Standard 4 and asking the focus group participants if these resonate with their experience. The focus group discussion could focus more on what more can be done to support people experiencing sexual harassment and domestic and family violence.

Standard 5 (Core Business) is best discussed with a group responsible for the organisation's public-facing work – e.g., teams responsible for media and communications, community engagement, and corporate social responsibility or senior executives. A 30-to-40-minute conversation with this group should provide the information needed to assess performance on this standard. The conversation can follow the format for Standards 1 to 3 – i.e., rating criteria associated with the standard and then discussing what can be improved. This discussion is summarised and presented to the employee focus group for comment and to see if they have further ideas on what can be done to improve performance against this standard.

## Recording and analysing your focus group discussions

You may wish to use the [*Employee focus group discussion template*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/) for record-keeping. If you are organising more than one focus group, you can record the findings in a single template or on separate templates.

In terms of analysis, if you have more than one focus group, remember to compare the results and summarise your findings – what was common and what was different?

**Table 3:** Sample *Employee focus group discussion* template for Commitment. Refer to Table 1 for scoring information.

Commitment: We demonstrate an ongoing commitment to workplace gender equality and preventing sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.

| **What does it look like?** | **What have we done?** | **How can we improve?** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Leadership:* Our leaders, including board members and senior executives, take responsibility for promoting gender equality and preventing sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence as a priority.
 | Group 1:Group 2: | Group 1:Group 2: |
| Policy and practice:* We have a resourced strategy/plan to promote gender equality that includes the prevention of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.
 | Group 1:Group 2: | Group 1:Group 2: |
| Communications:* We articulate our commitment to gender equality and expectations of workplace behaviour in all internal and external communications
 | Group 1:Group 2: | Group 1:Group 2: |
| Accountability and reporting:* Our senior leaders’ key performance indicators (or equivalent performance assessment processes) recognise and reward efforts to promote gender equality and prevent sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.
 | Group 1:Group 2: | Group 1:Group 2: |

### Our score:

Group 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Group 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Final (average of x number of groups): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## Summary of key findings

Note that if more than one focus group is being held, use this section to highlight the similarities and differences between the discussions held in the focus groups.

# Next Steps

Once the employee focus groups have been completed, the analysis should be entered into the [*Organisational snapshot template*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/). You can then move on to the actionplanning stage.

The [*Action plan template*](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/tools-and-resources/) will assist you in planning and recording the actions you intend to take, when, and how to track your progress.