

Workplace Equality and Respect Model

SMALL ORGANISATIONS



**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.



"Our work lives have a significant influence on us professionally and personally, and help shape our attitudes, beliefs and behaviours around gender and violence against women."

— Our Watch Workplaces Team

Other acknowledgements

The Workplace Equality and Respect Model builds on the original 2014 Workplace Equality and Respect Standards. The revised model, developed by the Our Watch team, Dr Anuradha Mundkur, Alisha Taylor-Jones, and Maria Coviello, reflects the evolution of legislative frameworks to prevent violence against women and incorporates intersectional approaches to strengthen its foundations.

We also acknowledge the valuable contributions and expertise of the following individuals, whose input helped refine and enhance the model:

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PART 1

Workplace Equality and Respect Model

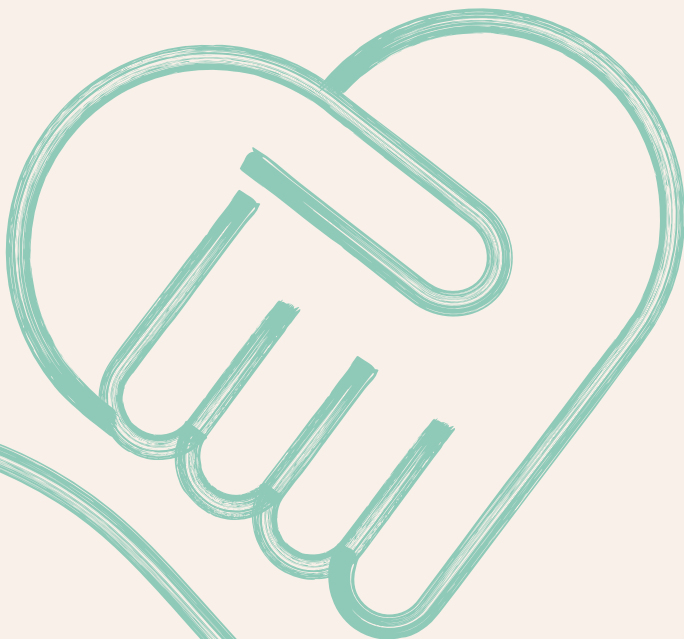
“Workplace cultures that normalise inequality also normalise abuse. When women and gender-diverse people are marginalised, underrepresented, or unheard, violence can flourish unchecked.”

— **Respect@Work Report, Australian Human Rights Commission¹**

Why a Workplace Equality and Respect Model?

Creating a workplace culture that values gender equality and respect is a powerful driver of safety and is critical for preventing gender-based violence at work. To create workplaces that are free from gender-based violence, you need to actively promote gender equality.²

Why? Whether it shows up in pay gaps, imbalances in leadership teams, or everyday disrespect, gender inequality creates the conditions where harassment and violence can take hold. When you lead with fairness and respect, people feel safe speaking up, contributing, and thriving. You’ll attract top talent, mitigate risks, and foster a stronger, more resilient workplace.





No matter what kind of organisation you are part of, whether you're a sole trader, running a small organisation, working in a community group, a large company, the public sector, or a non-profit, you have a role to play in creating a workplace culture that values gender equality, respect, and inclusion.

Building this kind of culture helps you meet your legal responsibilities, protect your people from harm, and build a strong, trusted reputation in your community and sector.

When everyone feels safe, respected, and included, your organisation becomes a better place to work, collaborate, and grow.

Why does workplace equality and respect matter?

Creating gender-equal and respectful workplaces is not just the right thing to do, it also gives your workplace a strategic advantage. Workplaces that fail to meet these standards face significant legal, financial, and reputational risks. Leaders in this space strengthen their brand, attract top talent, and unlock higher levels of employee engagement and performance.³

It's also important to recognise that people experience work differently depending on things like their age, disability, gender identity, and their race or ethnicity. When you design your workplace with these differences in mind, you create an environment where everyone feels safe, respected, and able to contribute.

Workplaces are always changing. Whether you're working remotely, in a hybrid setup, or using new digital tools, the way you run things can either support or undermine gender equality and respect. It all depends on how those systems are designed and managed. People today expect fairness, safety, and respect—not just in how they're treated, but in

how work gets done. That's why it's essential to incorporate gender equality and respect into your culture, processes, and physical and online spaces. The choices you make now will shape whether your workplace repeats old patterns or sets a new standard for safety, fairness, and inclusion.

Creating safe and respectful digital workplaces

In today's workplaces, online spaces and digital tools are central to how we communicate and collaborate, from email and instant messaging to collaboration platforms and social media, but they also carry risks that can impact respect and safety. In Australian workplaces, tech-based gender-based violence can include harassment via messaging apps, inappropriate or abusive comments on internal platforms, stalking through social media, or the misuse of features like message deletion to conceal abuse. These risks are amplified by the immediacy and openness of digital communication, the diversity of stakeholders interacting with these tools, enhanced online monitoring capacity used to stalk staff, and limited monitoring or response capacity. This is an emerging area of work that requires organisations to think critically about the tools they use, how they are configured, and the cultural and policy settings that govern them. Intervening through workplace culture, clear policies, and tool features can help mitigate harm and create safer and more respectful online environments.⁴



The business case for gender equality and respect^{5, 6, 7}

- Improvement in women's workplace wellbeing and the wellbeing of employees of all genders. Gender-based violence at work is linked to anxiety, depression, burnout, and absenteeism, costing the Australian economy over \$3.8 billion annually.⁸
- Higher morale and better teamwork, lower absenteeism, higher productivity, reduced burnout, and better safety outcomes. An evaluation of the Gender Equality Seal program, which aims to help businesses close gender gaps and improve workplace culture, was rolled out across 14 countries in over 750 companies. The evaluation found that when businesses take real steps to promote gender equality, everyone benefits.⁹
- Better performing organisations with more innovation, cohesion, and resilience. Attracting top talent, adapting well to change, and mitigating costly risks such as turnover and reputational harm. As the

Boston Consulting Group notes that inclusive workplaces build engaged, productive, and collaborative teams with lower attrition.¹⁰

What you can do

Recent changes to the Sex Discrimination Act and Work Health and Safety laws mean workplaces now have a positive duty to actively mitigate risk and prevent discrimination, harassment, and psychosocial harm. Meeting these obligations isn't just about ticking boxes, it's about creating a culture where safety, gender equality, and respect are part of how you lead, work, and grow.

The Workplace Equality and Respect Model provides a practical framework for building a safer, fairer, and more gender-equal workplace. It's flexible, so you can tailor it to your size, sector, and where you're at, whether you're just starting out or already have strategies in place. It also supports your planning around psychosocial risks, helping you strengthen what's working and close any gaps.

The Workplace Equality and Respect Model





Strategy and planning in practice

- **Plan with purpose:** Make gender equality and respectful workplace practices part of your planning. They can be applied across a wide range of areas, from your goals and risk management to your policies on harassment, flexible work, parental leave, recruitment, and performance reviews. These values should be built into the way your workplace operates, not added on later.
- **Use data to guide decisions:** Set up ways to track how you're doing on gender equality, inclusion, and safety. Use that information to keep improving.
- **Stay on top of your legal responsibilities:** Make sure your planning includes your obligations under anti-discrimination and workplace safety laws. It helps you reduce legal risk and protect your reputation.

Examples of actions

- ✓ Set clear goals around gender equality and respectful behaviours in strategic plans.
- ✓ Review and update policies related to harassment, flexible work arrangements, parental leave, recruitment, and performance reviews to ensure they reflect inclusive and respectful practices.
- ✓ Include gender equality in risk assessments to proactively identify and address potential issues.
- ✓ Set targets, such as gender-balanced leadership, and monitor progress over time.

Workplace culture in practice

- **Lead with purpose:** Ensure that you and your leadership team set the tone by modelling respectful behaviour that values fairness, equity, and mutual respect — and reinforcing it through everyday actions. Equip your managers with the skills they need to support diverse teams, address issues confidently, and create a workplace where everyone feels safe, heard, and valued.
- **Check your systems:** Look at things like pay, promotions, and who's in leadership roles. Running equity checks helps you spot and fix barriers that might be holding people back.
- **Hire and grow fairly:** Build recruitment and development processes that are fair, inclusive, transparent, and reflect the importance of gender equality, so you can attract and keep great people from all backgrounds.

Examples of actions

- ✓ Develop safety, respect and gender equality KPIs tied to leaders' goals, promotion, and pay. This matters because what leaders tolerate is the number one predictor of harassment risk.
- ✓ Support high-risk teams where culture is slipping. This can be done through facilitated sessions on what respect looks like in their workplace, activities where staff co-create behavioural norms and practice, and reflection exercises to reinforce those norms.



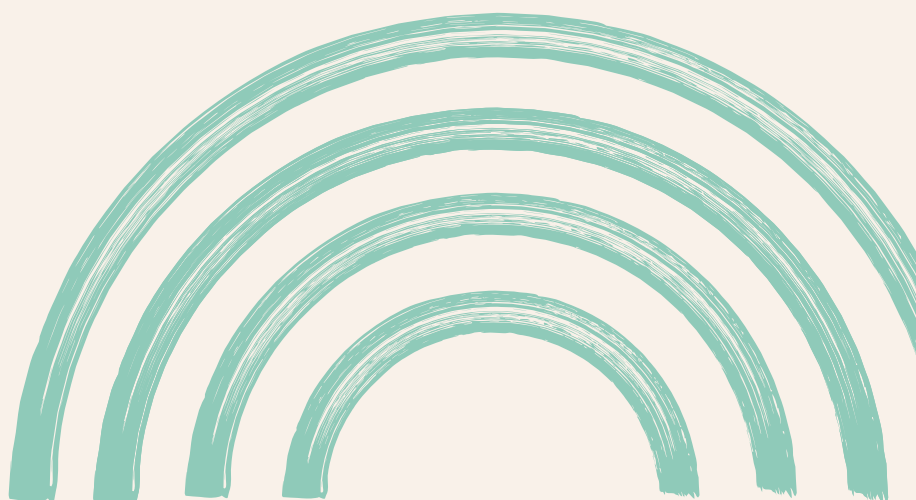
Everyday operations

- **Create safer workplaces:** You can set up clear, confidential, and trauma-informed ways for people to report and respond to workplace misconduct and sexual harassment. This helps build trust and shows your commitment to safety and respect.
- **Engage clients and communities inclusively:** When you design and deliver services, make sure they're accessible, culturally responsive, and inclusive of all genders. Pay particular attention to groups who often face disadvantage or discrimination.
- **Work with ethical suppliers and partners:** You have the power to shape procurement and partnerships by embedding gender equality, safety and respect into your supplier codes of conduct and decision-making criteria. It's a great way to extend your values beyond your own organisation.
- **Communicate with integrity:** Through your marketing and internal and external communications you can challenge outdated gender norms. Use gender-inclusive language and visuals, like showing women in leadership or technical roles, and men in caregiving roles or taking carer leave.

- **Design inclusive spaces:** Think about lighting, noise control, privacy, and other psychosocial factors. Inclusive design principles that support policies on safety, respect and gender equality can ensure everyone feels welcome and valued in the workplace.

Examples of actions

- ✓ Treat sexual harassment as a preventable work design risk, which is named as a formal hazard in the risk register.
- ✓ Consult with employees on risk prevalence and mitigation, run annual risk assessments, and redesign risky roles and situations.
- ✓ Co-design safe reporting channels (more than just HR), committing to fast handling and auditing for retaliation risks.





Setting the scene

CASE STUDY

When silence becomes the norm

At R Me, a small manufacturing business with 35 employees, teamwork and loyalty were seen as the backbone of success. The company prided itself on being 'like a family,' where everyone knew each other and things were handled informally. Over time, however, small issues began to surface.

A few male team members regularly made jokes and comments about women's appearances in the break room. When Bea, an employee with a mild hearing impairment, said she felt uncomfortable, others brushed it off as 'just banter.' Because she sometimes used a hearing aid, colleagues would mimic her or exaggerate their speech 'as a joke.' Bea laughed along at first, not wanting to make things awkward, but the constant teasing and comments wore her down.

When the behaviour continued, Bea raised her concerns with her supervisor. He dismissed it, saying, 'Andy's harmless, he's just old-school.' No one followed up, and expectations remained unclear. Months later, an edited image of Bea appeared in a staff group chat with her face placed on another person's body in a revealing outfit. The image was shared widely, with laughing emojis from colleagues. Bea was humiliated.

When she reported the incident to HR, she was asked for proof and urged to 'keep it internal.' The process felt unsafe and dismissive. Rumours spread that Bea was 'too sensitive' or 'struggling because of her hearing.' She eventually took extended leave and resigned. Bea's experience reflected deeper issues:

- a culture that excused poor behaviour as 'banter' or an acceptable expression of someone's personality
- supervisors unsure of how to respond to reports of disrespect or harassment
- systems that failed to recognise how gender and disability can intersect to shape people's experiences
- no clear policy or training on what safe and respectful behaviour looks like
- no trusted, confidential way to raise concerns or seek support.

R Me didn't intend to cause harm, but silence and inaction allowed disrespect to grow unchecked.

What could the workplace in the case study have done differently, and what can it do now?

By using the [Workplace Gender Equality and Respect Model](#) and [How-to guide: Leading gender equality, safety and respect](#), workplaces can move from can move from silence and hesitation to real prevention. You can foster a workplace where everyone feels safe to speak up, and gender equality, safety, and respect are built into everyday decisions, systems, and behaviours.

Source: This scenario is inspired by the real-life stories from the Australian Human Rights Commission's [A Bad Business – Case Studies](#).



PART 2

How-to-guide: Leading gender equality, safety and respect

The good news is that creating a safe, equal, and respectful workplace is possible.

Real change comes from genuine commitment and consistent action. It's not about ticking boxes, it's about building a culture where everyone feels valued, heard, and supported. When you lead with gender equality, safety, and respect, you prevent gender-based violence (including sexual harassment) and meet your legal duties. This guide brings together practical tips and insights from a variety of trusted and credible sources. You can explore these references, along with extra tools and resources to help you on your journey, in the section [Further reading](#).

Even with a small team, meaningful steps are within reach: how you lead, the policies you set, how you engage with staff, and how you keep learning and improving. Meaningful change requires deliberate action across three key areas outlined in the Workplace Equality and Respect Model.

» Workplaces of different sizes have different obligations and resources. You can find more information for sole traders and micro-workplaces (with zero to 20 employees) [here](#). And you can find more information for medium to large workplaces (with over 100 employees) [here](#).

Keeping your workplace safe and respectful

Running a small organisation (with 21–99 employees) comes with plenty of rewards and challenges. Beyond the day-to-day work, there's managing compliance, certifications, and approvals. The last thing you need is unsafe or disrespectful behaviour from customers, clients, suppliers, or colleagues.

Keeping your workplace safe, fair, and respectful is part of running a healthy business. Alongside your Work Health and Safety (WHS) and Fair Work responsibilities, there's also a *positive duty*. It's part of the Respect@Work reforms made through recent amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act. It means you're expected to take proactive steps to prevent things like sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and victimisation *before* they happen.

In addition, WHS regulations explicitly require the management of not only physical risks like faulty equipment, but also *psychosocial hazards*. These are things that can impact mental health and wellbeing, like bullying, work-related stress, and sexual harassment. Identifying, assessing and controlling workplace risks relating to psychosocial safety helps to create a workplace where everyone feels safe and valued.



Not every small workplace has HR staff or formal systems, and that's okay. What matters most is taking simple, practical steps to build a respectful culture by:

- leading by example
- listening to your team
- putting inclusive practices in place
- making sure everyone feels safe and respected.

This guide will help you take those steps, with realistic actions that work for small workplaces with 21–99 employees. It is intended for people leading small workplaces and human resource personnel (if a small workplace has a dedicated resource for this purpose).

Remember, people experience the workplace differently

Everyone experiences work differently. Things like our background, gender, age, disability, sexuality, or culture all shape how we show up and how others see us. These differences can affect what feels safe, fair, or welcoming at work.

For example, a woman with a disability may face different barriers than one without, and a lesbian woman with a disability might face extra challenges because of how people view sexuality and disability.

Sometimes, business practices unintentionally exclude people, like holding events at night that make it hard for those with caring responsibilities to attend.

Small changes can make a big difference to how included and respected people feel.

Resources



» [Intersectionality in the workplace: A starter kit for flexible work and talent management](#) is a starting point for workplaces to promote inclusive gender equality as a key approach to fostering workplace equality and respect.

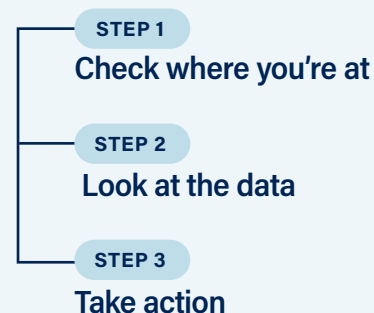
» [Creating safe, equal and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women: A beginner's guide](#), which draws on the evidence base of *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*, to guide efforts to prevent violence and promote respectful, safe, and inclusive workplace environments.

» [Creating safety, equality, inclusion and respect for women with disabilities in the workplace: A guide](#), offering practical guidance on fostering accessibility and inclusion, informed by the evidence base of *Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities*.

» [Pride in Prevention Evidence Guide](#) from Rainbow Health Victoria, as well as in *Pride in Diversity's Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI)* publications.

Next

Follow these 3 steps:





How-to-guide: Check where you're at

STEP 1

Check where you're at

Gender-based violence at work (like sexual harassment) often happens when there's unfair treatment, stereotypes, or a lack of respect toward certain people. Even as a small business or small organisation, you can set the tone and the standard for interactions that support gender equality, safety, and respect.

Before diving into new initiatives around workplace equality and respect, it's a good idea to pause and check how ready your organisation is. Think of it as a quick health check for your workplace culture.

The ['Am I ready?' starter scan](#) helps you take stock of what's already in place: things like policies, leadership support, available resources, and the overall vibe of your workplace. It's a simple way to spot what's working, where there might be gaps, and what could use a bit of attention.

This isn't a one-size-fits-all checklist. Whether you've got 25 people in one office or 90 staff spread across a few locations, the tool can flex to suit your setup. It's designed to help you make changes that are practical, targeted, and backed by your team.

Before you kick off any new work around equality and respect in your workplace, there are a few things worth keeping front and centre.

Get leadership on board

Make sure your leaders, whether that's you as a CEO, a manager, or a business owner, understand why this work matters. It's not just about ticking boxes, it's about creating a better environment for your people and your workplace. Explain the benefits and offer some training so people feel confident backing respectful workplace practices.

Set up a project team

You don't need a big committee. Just pull together a small group from different parts of the organisation who can help lead the work.

Plan your communications

Let your people know what's happening and why. Talk about your values, what respectful behaviour looks like, and how people can speak up safely. You can even bring clients and partners into the conversation if it makes sense.



Some Our Watch tools that can help you get started are:

- » [Setting up for success.](#)
- » [Am I ready? Starter scan.](#)
- » [Toolkit: Communicating safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace.](#)
- » [Toolkit: Engaging leaders to prevent gender-based violence in the workplace.](#)

Resources



- » [Link between gender inequality and violence.](#) Learn how gender inequality contributes to violence and harassment.
- » [How to take an intersectional approach.](#) Understand how different identities and experiences affect the risk and impact of violence.
- » [Free events and webinars.](#) Join free webinars and training sessions to learn how to create safer, more respectful workplaces.



Setting up for success

HANDOUT

There are practical and logistical considerations for undertaking this work (resourcing time, personnel, expertise, and finance). Ask these questions to check if you have all the building blocks in place before you begin:

1. **Has our leadership team (CEO/board members/senior executives) committed to creating a safe, gender equal, and respectful workplace? If not, you can check out Our Watch's [Engaging leadership teams](#).**

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. **a) Do we have a team to lead work on implementing Workplace Equality and Respect (or if it's yourself, is there expertise you can draw on)?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

- b) Has this team's (or your) engagement in this work been factored into their workplan?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

3. **Do we have the time, people, and budget to support this work meaningfully? Are there existing teams (for example, HR, diversity and inclusion, workplace health and safety) with the capacity and expertise to lead or support this initiative?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

4. **Do we have trusted channels for feedback on workplace culture issues that we can use?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

5. **As a workplace, are we confident that:**

- a) We have trained key staff who know how to respond appropriately and safely to disclosures of gender-based violence or discrimination?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

- b) Our staff know where to seek support if they are experiencing gender-based violence?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

- c) Our staff know what processes we have in place to disclose experiences of gender-based violence?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

- d) We know what would help our workplace feel more prepared to respond safely and appropriately?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

6. **As a workplace, are we confident that we have policies and procedures to respond appropriately to disclosures of gender-based violence (including family and domestic violence and sexual harassment) and/or gender-based discrimination?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

If you answered 'no' to any of these questions, you would need to take action to address the gaps you have identified. Please have a look at the [Our Watch website](#) to view relevant resources (tipsheets, toolkits, webinars, videos and checklists) to help meet the readiness requirements.

You can contact the Our Watch Workplaces team at:
equalityandrespect@ourwatch.org.au.



'Am I ready?' starter scan for Workplace Equality and Respect

HANDOUT

This tool is here to help you get started (or keep going) on building a workplace culture that's fair, respectful, and safe for everyone. It offers a set of guiding questions to help you think through what needs to be in place before you begin building a more gender-equal and respectful workplace, one that actively works to prevent gender-based violence at work. It's designed for senior executives, HR, and Diversity & Inclusion teams.

The first set of questions is designed to help you reflect on your workplace culture and everyday practices. It can be helpful to explore these with a few staff members or chat with peers or people in your network. That way, you get a mix of perspectives. The answers will give you a clearer picture of what might help drive positive change and where you might hit some bumps along the way. Knowing upfront what resistance you might face means you can plan and be ready to respond.

My workplace's culture and everyday practices

Understand readiness for another culture shift

1. How do employees generally respond to organisational change?

2. What concerns might people have about a gender equality and gender-based violence prevention initiative?

3. What barriers could prevent engagement, for example, time pressures, cynicism, or perceived irrelevance?



4. Who are likely to be the biggest champions and resisters of this change, and why?

5. Are there influential individuals or groups who may resist or undermine change efforts—intentionally or unintentionally?

Consider contextual influences on organisational culture

1. What internal factors are motivating this culture change initiative, for example, values, leadership priorities, staff feedback, workplace incidents, or a desire to create a safer and more inclusive environment?

2. Why does our workplace believe a culture change is needed at this time?

3. What internal goals or challenges are we hoping this initiative will address, for example, improving trust, increasing gender equality, reducing staff turnover, or strengthening wellbeing)?



4. What external pressures shape our approach to gender equality, for example, legislation, industry standards, or social expectations?

5. How does our workplace compare with peers or competitors in advancing gender equity?

6. Are there partnerships or networks we could leverage to strengthen our culture change initiative?

Understand appetite for change

1. How have previous workplace change initiatives been received and sustained?

2. Have we successfully implemented other culture change initiatives in the past?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3. What has helped or hindered our workplace or culture change efforts in the past?



What supports, knowledge, or tools would help me and/or my leadership team feel more confident leading by example on gender equality and respectful practices?

- ☐ Access to practical guidelines or training
- ☐ Networking with like-minded practitioners
- ☐ Coaching or mentoring
- ☐ More time or funding
- ☐ Other:

How do my staff, clients, or collaborators typically respond to conversations about gender equality or respectful workplace culture?

- ☐ Highly supportive and engaged
- ☐ Mixed reactions: there is some interest, some resistance
- ☐ Little awareness or openness
- ☐ I'm not sure, I haven't explored this yet

If you're not yet ready or feeling unsure, that's okay. Starting with curiosity and a willingness to learn is a strong first step. Focus on small, practical actions, seek out support or resources, and connect with others who are also learning.

Please have a look at the [Our Watch website](#) to view relevant resources (tipsheets, toolkits, webinars, videos and checklists) to help meet the readiness requirements.

You can contact the Our Watch Workplaces team at: equalityandrespect@ourwatch.org.au.



STEP 2

Look at the data

Before you make any changes, it's a good idea to get a clear sense of what your workplace culture looks like right now. Gather information: What's working? What's missing? Use this to decide what needs attention.

Think of this step as taking a snapshot that helps determine where you might focus your energy.

Ask your team

Start with a few simple surveys or informal chats to hear what your staff think about gender equality, safety, and respect. If you can, run a couple of focus groups or interviews. Bringing in someone external can help people feel more comfortable speaking up.

Check your policies

Take a look at what you already have in place around things like gender equality, harassment, and family violence. Are the policies clear, up to date, and easy for your team to understand and use?

Fill in the gaps

If you're missing info, like feedback from casual staff or insights from different teams, make a plan to gather it. The goal is to build a snapshot that helps answer these questions:

- What's our current situation?
- What are we doing well?
- Where are the gaps?
- What should we focus on next?

This doesn't need to be complicated. Even a few well-placed questions and a quick policy review can give you valuable insights to guide your next steps. If you have more than 50 employees you may want to do a simple survey and run a couple of focus groups.

Alert!

If you have a team and are trying to gather feedback, do it in a way that feels safe and private. In small workplaces, surveys or group chats can make people feel exposed, especially when there are only a few women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, or people with disabilities. Instead, build feedback into regular one-on-one conversations, where people can speak openly without risking their privacy. If you do need to collect broader feedback, consider using a trusted third-party provider to manage surveys or data collection. This helps ensure confidentiality, reduces the risk of individuals being identified, and allows staff to share their experiences more freely and safely.

These resources help guide how you collect data:

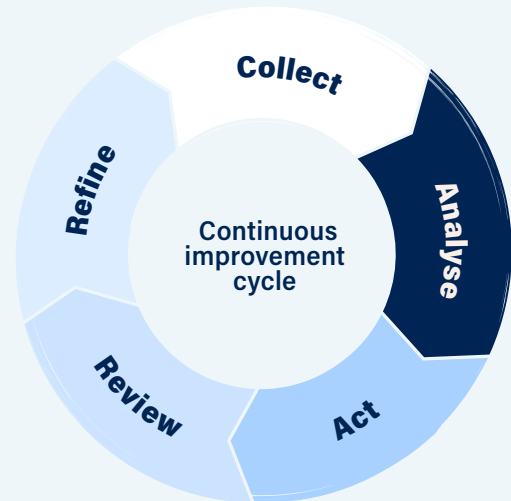
- » [Fact sheet: Great practice in collecting and analysing diversity data.](#)
- » [FAQs: Collecting and analysing data.](#)
- » [Tip sheet: Designing equality and respect surveys.](#)
- » [Tip sheet: Running employee focus groups.](#)



Fact sheet: Great practice in collecting and analysing diversity data

Understanding what is happening in your workplace, and how you can best foster spaces where people feel safe, respected, equal, and valued, starts with the data. You need to know who is in your workplace, and how they experience your workplace, to make cultural change.

Think of it as a continuous improvement cycle: Collect → Analyse → Act → Review → Refine. Each round helps deepen understanding and build a stronger, more gender equal workplace culture.



Be clear about the purpose

A note from leadership goes a long way in building trust.

- Tell employees *why* you're collecting diversity data.
- Use simple language, for example: 'We're collecting this information to understand pay equity, and close any gender pay gaps in our workplace.'
- Include this message in surveys, forms, and emails.

It's easy to think identity traits like gender, religion, or disability aren't relevant at work, but they shape how safe, respected, and included people feel. Gathering thoughtful, confidential insights helps you create policies and practices that support everyone and build a truly respectful workplace.



Collect and use only what you need

Fewer questions = higher response rates.

To understand who works in your organisation, go beyond gender. Different identity characteristics and experiences influence how people engage with the workplace.

Do:

- Gather essential employment information such as role/level, employment type, pay (base and extras) and tenure (usually available through HR or payroll systems), gender, age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, disability, cultural background/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.
- Make all identity questions optional and explain *why* you're collecting them.
- Run a 'data minimisation check' — if it's not needed, don't ask for it.
Ask: Do we really need this information to achieve our diversity and inclusion goals?

Avoid:

- Asking for data that doesn't serve a clear purpose.
- Forcing responses to personal questions.
- Over-collecting data 'just in case.' Avoid 'nice-to-have' data that doesn't serve the purpose.

Use inclusive and respectful practices

Inclusion and respect = better participation and stronger engagement.

- Provide gender options beyond 'male/female' or 'man/woman': add in 'Non-binary', 'Trans', 'Self-describe' (with an open text field), and 'Prefer not to say'.
- Allow employees to update details anytime, not just once a year.
- Use a free, anonymous survey tool if you don't have a Human Resource Information System (HRIS)
 - Consider using platforms like Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, or SurveyMonkey for quick, anonymous feedback. If you're looking for deeper insights into employee experience, engagement, and culture, explore people engagement platforms such as Culture Amp, Peakon, or Qualtrics.
 - Whatever platform you choose, ensure it's accessible for people with disability.



Protect privacy and sensitivities

If you only have a handful of staff, report results in broad categories only (e.g., 'all staff at management level'), not by team.

- Store data securely (encrypted HR platform or password-protected files within a 2FA-enabled environment).
- Limit access to detailed data (ideally HR lead/business owner and one analyst) and provide topline insights/themes to the team.
- Don't report results where fewer than 10 people are in a group—a small sample size makes it too easy to identify particular individuals and may erode confidence in the anonymity of the survey, decreasing response rates.
- Establish a data retention policy and delete diversity data when it's no longer needed.

Maintain data quality

Keep a simple spreadsheet with consistent labels—avoid free-text where possible.

- Standardise job titles (merge 'Team Lead' and 'Manager' if they're the same level).
- Do a quarterly data audit for accuracy.

Analyse for insights (not just averages)

Even a simple colour-coded Excel table can reveal trends

- Compare like-for-like roles (for example, two engineers, not CEO vs admin).
- Where possible, compare outcomes across different groups, like comparing pay or promotion rates for Aboriginal staff or women of colour and other employees, to help uncover hidden inequalities.
- Look for other hidden patterns by asking questions like:
 - Is one gender offered more overtime?
 - Is one gender clustered in casual or part-time roles?
- Use visuals (bar charts, heat maps) to make gaps obvious and engage the business with the findings and planned remediation actions.



Turn data into action

A one-page summary shared at team meetings builds trust and shows commitment to making real change which will, in turn, increase the quantity and quality of response rates over time.

- Link findings to clear actions:
 - adjust pay bands
 - review bonus or overtime policies
 - invest in leadership pathways for underrepresented groups.
- Track progress with a simple dashboard and share updates annually.



Key takeaways

- * Collect data with care, analyse responsibly, and turn insights into action.
- * With the right approach, diversity data builds trust and drives fairness, retention and positive talent acquisition outcomes.

This fact sheet was compiled by Our Watch and [Sorrel Kelsby](#). Sorrel Kelsby is the Founder & Co-CEO of EvenBetter, a Gender-Pay-Gap Management and Workforce Intelligence platform empowering organisations to close gender pay gaps, boost participation equity, and build diverse, high-performing teams where talent thrives



A few ways to build on and improve your approach

Share results transparently

Communicate findings clearly, even if gaps are found.

Example: 'We found a 5% gender pay gap in X level roles. We are adjusting pay bands and will review again in 12 months.'

Example: 'There was a hot spot of reports of unwanted behaviours at Y work site. We are setting up some listening circle sessions with staff and running active bystander training with the team.'

Transparency builds credibility.

Benchmark externally

Compare your internal gender pay gap results with industry or national benchmarks to understand how you're tracking. A great starting point is the [Workplace Gender Equality Agency](#), which publishes annual industry cohort benchmarks each March. You can also sign up to national workplace diversity and inclusion benchmarks and awards such as the [Australian Workplace Equality Index](#) (LGBTIQA+ inclusion), the Action and Inclusion Index (disability inclusion), or the [Inclusion@Work Index](#) (cultural diversity and inclusion).

Create a feedback loop

Give employees a way to share how safe, clear, and respectful the process felt. Use this feedback to refine future data collection processes.

Reinforce legal and ethical compliance

Follow privacy laws under the [Australian Privacy Act](#) (even if you're exempt, that is, under \$3M turnover) to show staff their data is safe and handled responsibly.

Embed accountability

Assign clear ownership for actions arising from data collection and analysis. Identify who will be responsible for following through, such as a member of the leadership team, the board or the business owner. Set review points for example every 6–12 months, and re-collect data annually at a minimum.

Accountability prevents any perception of the process being a 'tick-box' exercise.

Find out more about fostering safe, respectful, and equal workplaces:

» [Our Watch's website.](#)

» You can also access tools and expertise on data collection through www.evenbetter.ai.



FAQs: Collecting and analysing data

HANDOUT: FOR EMPLOYEES

This FAQ is designed to help you understand why your organisation is collecting data on workplace equality and respect. It explains what diversity data is, how your privacy is protected, and how the results will be used to improve your workplace. It will let you know what to expect from the survey and focus groups, how your voice contributes to positive change, and how your organisation is committed to making the process inclusive, respectful, and transparent.

Why do we collect diversity data?

We collect diversity data to:

- understand representation, inclusion, and equity in our workplace
- identify pay or promotion gaps
- ensure fair and equal treatment and experiences for all employees
- inform strategies to promote gender equality and workplace respect.

This includes demographic and identity information such as:

- gender identity (with inclusive options)
- age
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity
- disability status
- cultural background or ethnicity
- sexual orientation
- caring responsibilities
- role, level, employment type, and tenure
- pay details (salary + allowances/bonuses)
- marital/parental/carer status.

Your privacy matters

We are committed to protecting your privacy by making sure:

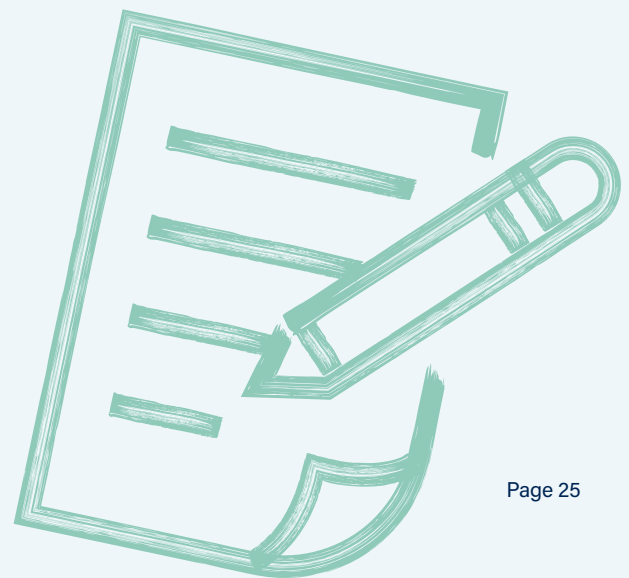
- participation is voluntary and based on informed consent
- you can always choose 'Prefer not to say'
- to analyse partial responses as these still help build the picture of our organisation
- no names are attached in reporting
- only authorised staff can access records
- results are shared only in grouped/average form
- we comply with the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs)
- data is stored securely and deleted after analysis and reporting.

Making surveys accessible

We offer:

- alternative formats (plain language, translated versions, verbal responses)
- support for staff with accessibility needs or limited digital literacy.

If you need assistance, please contact [insert contact details].





Using focus group data

In addition to surveys, we may also conduct focus groups to gather deeper insights into employee experiences and perspectives.

These sessions:

- allow for open discussion and exploration of themes that may not emerge in surveys
- help us understand the context behind the data and identify practical solutions
- are facilitated in a safe, respectful, and confidential environment
- are voluntary, and participants can choose how much they wish to share.

Focus group findings are summarised anonymously and used to complement survey data in shaping workplace strategies.

How results will be used

Your input helps us:

- identify strengths and areas for improvement
- develop action plans (for example, review salary bands, improve leave support)
- track progress over time
- share progress regularly so you see impact.

We are committed to:

- sharing results transparently
- framing results constructively
- using inclusive, non-blaming language.

A continuous improvement cycle

We treat collecting data on workplace equality and respect as part of an ongoing process:

Collect → Analyse → Act → Review → Refine



Key takeaway

- * Your input helps build a fair, equitable workplace, and your privacy is fully protected. What we share are the patterns, not the people.

These FAQs were by Our Watch and [Sorrel Kelsby](#). Sorrel Kelsby is the Founder & Co-CEO of EvenBetter, a Gender-Pay-Gap Management and Workforce Intelligence platform empowering organisations to close gender pay gaps, boost participation equity, and build diverse, high-performing teams where talent thrives.



Tip sheet: Designing equality and respect surveys

Surveys in small workplaces are a powerful way to understand how staff experience gender equality, safety, and respect. They don't need to be complex, just clear, confidential, and focused on what matters most.

1

Protect privacy

- Don't collect names or identifiable information.
- Share results in summary form only.
- Make it clear that participation is voluntary and confidential.
- If there's less than 10 responses avoid disaggregation by demographic categories as it can easily identify individuals.

2

Use results to drive change

- Share key findings with staff.
- Identify 1–2 practical actions you can take.
- Follow up with updates so staff see their input is valued.

3

Provide a short FAQ or handout

This builds trust and encourages honest feedback. Explain:

- why the survey is being done
- how privacy is protected
- what will happen with the results.

Keep it simple and focused

4

- Use short, plain-language questions.
- Limit the survey to 10–15 questions to encourage participation.
- Focus on key areas: gender equality, respect, safety, and leadership support.
 - **Respectful workplace culture** covers mutual respect, professionalism, and the consistent use of respectful language and behaviour.
 - **Inclusion and belonging** focuses on inclusive behaviour, role-modelling by leaders, and ensuring everyone feels valued and included.
 - **Psychological safety and voice** encompasses confidence in speaking up, feeling safe to express concerns, and trust that voices will be heard.
 - **Equality and accountability** relates to how seriously harassment or discrimination concerns are handled, and whether complaints are managed fairly and transparently.
 - **Responsiveness and continuous improvement** reflects whether feedback leads to visible change and demonstrates organisational learning and growth.
 - **Equitable organisational practices** consider fair career progression, workplace entitlements like flexible work and leave arrangements (including parental leave), gender pay gaps, and workforce composition.



5

Include demographic questions

This will help you understand the different experiences across your team. Keep these optional and include a 'prefer not to say' option.

Gender identity

- Ask how individuals identify (for example, male, female, gender-diverse)
- Ask whether people identify as part of the LGBTIQA+ community.

Age group

- Include age brackets to understand generational perspectives.

Management role

- Determine if the respondent holds a leadership or supervisory position and at what level (for example, executive, senior, middle, line manager).

Employment type

- Clarify the basis of employment (for example, full-time, part-time, casual) and the nature of the role (for example, permanent, contract, secondment).

Tenure

- Ask how long the individual has been employed at the organisation.

Caring responsibilities

- Include questions about being a parent or guardian, having dependent children at home, or other caring responsibilities.

Cultural background

- Ask about the country of birth and whether English is the primary language spoken at home.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity

- Include options to identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, both, or neither.

Disability status

- Ask whether the individual lives with a disability.



Tip sheet: Running employee focus groups

Employee focus groups are a valuable tool for small workplaces (21-99 employees) to reflect on progress toward creating a safe, equal, and respectful workplace. They help identify strengths and gaps, and generate practical ideas for improvement, all while building trust and engagement.

1 Before you begin

Lay the groundwork to ensure success

- **Leadership support:** Ensure business owners or senior leaders endorse and communicate the purpose of the focus groups.
- **Planning team:** Even in small teams, designate a few staff to help coordinate logistics and communication.
- **Preparation:** If available, review any existing employee feedback or HR data to inform the process.
- **Consider creating a short employee handout or FAQ to explain:**
 - why data is being collected
 - how privacy is protected
 - how feedback will be used to improve the workplace.

2 Key planning decisions

Facilitator

- Choose someone with experience in small group facilitation and workplace culture (this could be an internal staff member or an external consultant).
- For small organisations, internal facilitators may be more cost-effective, but external ones can offer neutrality and expertise.
- Facilitators should have access to the organisational snapshot created in Step 2. As a reminder, this is the step where you collect and analyse data on your workplace, including people surveys and employee focus groups.

Group size and representation

- Aim for 20-30% staff participation as a realistic target for small businesses with 20-99 employees. This would mean 4-6 people in a business with 20 employees, and 12-30 people in a business with 99 employees.
- Keep groups to 5-10 people to allow for meaningful discussion.
- Ensure diversity in gender, age, role, and background.



Format

- Choose between in-person or online sessions based on staff availability and comfort.
- Online sessions may be more flexible for organisations with part-time or remote staff.

Timing and logistics

- Each session can be about two hours, depending on the depth of discussion.
- Consider splitting into two shorter sessions if needed.
- Add time if staff haven't received foundational training in workplace respect or gender equality.

3

Communication and invitations

Invitations should come from a senior leader or business owner to show commitment

Include:

- purpose and agenda
- time commitment
- any pre-reading or reflection questions
- assurance of confidentiality
- the [FAQs: Collecting and analysing data](#).

Additional Tips

- Foster open, respectful dialogue.
- Create a safe and inclusive space for sharing.
- Use a note-taker or scribe to capture feedback anonymously.
- Clearly communicate how employee input will shape future actions.
- Make sure that you pay staff for their time, their insights and expertise are valuable.

4

Post-session follow-up

Share a summary of key themes and next steps with all staff

- Protect confidentiality by sharing high-level themes only, avoid identifiable details, and clearly state how confidentiality has been maintained.
- Close the loop with purpose by communicating not just what you heard, but what will change as a result, outline clear actions, responsibilities, and timeframes to build trust and credibility.
- Acknowledge participation and risk by thanking participants for speaking up, recognising the courage involved, and reinforcing the organisation's commitment to creating safer, more respectful workplaces.



STEP 3

Take action

Now that you've got a good sense of where your workplace stands, it's time to start planning your next steps. This is where you turn what you've learned into changes that actually stick and make a difference.

Start with what you've learned

Use everything you've gathered—your workplace snapshot, staff feedback, and policy reviews, to shape your plan. Focus on the areas that matter most to your team and your organisation.

Set clear goals

Think about what you want to achieve in the short term (like updating a policy or running a training session) and the longer term (like shifting workplace culture or improving how issues are reported). Keep your goals realistic and easy to measure.

Make sure it's resourced

Even small changes need time, people, and budget. Prioritise staff safety and wellbeing, and make sure whoever's leading the work has the support they need to keep things moving.

Link it to what you're already doing

If you've already got Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies or gender equality goals in place, build on them. That way, everything stays aligned and you're not doubling up.

A few things to keep in mind

Get your leaders involved early

Whether it's CEOs, managers, or team leads, having them on board from the start helps set the tone and keep things on track.

Take it step by step

You don't have to do everything at once. Break things into manageable stages that fit your time, budget, and team capacity.

Make sure everyone's included

Check that your approach works for all staff, including people from different backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Gender equality, safety, and respect should be built in, not added on later.

Be ready for pushback

Not everyone will be on board right away and that's OK. [Plan ahead for how you'll respond to resistance](#) and keep the conversation constructive.

Celebrate wins

Share progress with your team and take time to acknowledge what's been achieved. It helps build momentum and keeps people engaged.



You don't need a complicated strategy, just a few steps you're ready to commit to. Think of it as a working plan that fits your workplace and helps you stay on track. Use what you learned in your earlier reflection (what's working, what's missing, and what needs attention), your employee survey and focus groups to set small goals and create a bank of actions to implement.

You can use the [Your playbook of actions](#) section as a starting point for building your plan of action. To help you prioritise the actions, you may want to use a two-step process.

Begin with a prioritisation grid (below) that maps actions to cost (cheap or expensive) and effort (easy or hard).

Example prioritisation grid

	Easy	Hard
Cheap	■ Add a values-based statement to your email footer or website. ■ Use inclusive language in contracts and communications. ■ Display support contacts like 1800RESPECT on your website or materials.	■ Create a one-page gender equality, safety, and respect action plan. ■ Run annual risk assessments for psychosocial hazards. ■ Record and respond to incidents confidentially.
Expensive	■ Attend low-cost training on harassment, bias, or cultural safety. ■ Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses via Supply Nation.	■ Conduct an annual equity and accessibility review using tools like the CBM Gender and Disability Analysis Toolkit. ■ Resource lived experience engagement meaningfully (e.g. paying contributors, adapting materials).



Prioritisation grid

[HANDOUT](#)

	Easy	Hard
Cheap		
Expensive		



Next, once you have plotted your actions in this grid, you can set yourself monthly goals. Use a simplified MoSCoW method:

- **Must do:** Top priority. These go straight into your final action plan.
- **Should do:** Important, but not critical. You'll include these actions in your plan as well but can phase in the implementation.
- **Could do:** Good ideas and will improve outcomes, but not essential right now.
- **Won't do (yet):** Not a priority now.

Track your progress using a simple traffic light system (see below example).

Once or twice a year, take a moment to reflect. What's working well? What could be better? Measure progress, share results, and keep making things better.

Example progress tracker

Action	Priority	Status
Add a values statement to your website or email footer	Must Do	COMPLETED
Run annual risk assessments	Should Do	IN PROGRESS
Pay contributors with lived experience for input	Could Do	IN PROGRESS
Hire external consultants for inclusion audits	Not Now	NOT STARTED



Progress tracker

[HANDOUT](#)

STATUS:

NOT STARTED

IN PROGRESS

COMPLETED

Action	Priority	Status



Implementing your plan

Now you've got your action plan, it's time to implement it.

If your team already uses a project management format, stick with it. The goal is to make this process fit smoothly into your existing ways of working. Use language and tools your team already knows. If you're using platforms like Microsoft Project, ASANA, Trello, or similar, go with those.

If you don't have a system in place, try something like Kanban. Kanban started in the 1950s at Toyota as a scheduling system for lean/just-in-time manufacturing. Today, it's used across industries, especially where workloads are complex and resources are tight.

Here's how a Kanban board can help with your action plan:

- everyone on the team can see it, digitally or physically
- team members take ownership of actions
- you set clear rules for how actions move through the workflow.

Keep moving and improving

Using a Kanban board is a great way to keep your work visible and flexible—but don't stop there. Once you've started making changes, it's important to check in regularly (once or twice a year is a good rhythm) to see how things are tracking. Think about:

- inputs (what you put in)
- outputs (what you did)
- outcomes (what changed).

Here are a few ways to keep momentum going:

- **Reflect on progress:** What's working well? What's made a difference? What still feels clunky or unclear? These check-ins don't need to be formal—just honest and consistent.

- **Ask your team again:** A quick survey, a few one-on-one chats, or a team discussion can offer fresh insights. People's experiences change, and your approach should evolve with them.
- **Look at what's changed:** Have any policies been updated? Are people more confident speaking up? Are managers better equipped to respond? Use whatever tools work for you—a spreadsheet, shared doc, or simple checklist—to track progress.
- **Report on your progress:** Capture your inputs (what you put in), outputs (what you did), and outcomes (what changed). This becomes your story of impact.
- **Share what you've learned:** Keep your leadership team and board in the loop. Let your broader team know what's improved and what's still in progress. Transparency builds trust and keeps people engaged.
- **Adjust as needed:** If something isn't working, tweak it. The goal isn't perfection—it's progress.

You're on your way

Workplaces are always evolving with new ways of working, emerging technologies, and changing laws. So, while these actions aren't exhaustive, they're a great starting point. By taking these steps and using the Workplace Equality and Respect Model, you're setting your organisation up to be safer, more inclusive, and more resilient. You'll also be helping to reduce risks linked to psychosocial hazards like sexual harassment and discrimination.

We encourage you to explore these tools – and the many other resources available on the [Our Watch Workplaces website](#) – to help build and maintain a workplace that's safe, equal, and respectful for everyone.



Implementation: KanBan Space

[HANDOUT](#)**To Do****Doing****Done**

Suggested Kanban rules:

Team members must add their name to an action before moving it to the 'Doing' (or WIP – Work In Progress) column.

Only actions in the 'Doing' column can be worked on.

The number of actions in 'Doing' is limited to avoid overload.

Move actions to 'Done' when completed, or back to 'To do' if paused.



Your playbook of actions

No matter the size of your business, you have a positive duty to take reasonable, proactive steps to prevent gender-based violence at work. This includes stopping sexual harassment, discrimination, and any behaviour that undermines gender equality, safety, and respect.

This playbook of actions brings together practical tips and insights from a variety of trusted and credible sources. You can explore these references, along with extra tools and resources to help you on your journey, in the section [Further reading](#).

Your responsibility doesn't stop with your team, it also covers how you work with clients, suppliers, contractors, and partners. Building gender equality, safety, and respect into every part of your business isn't just about compliance, it's about good leadership and creating a workplace people trust and want to be part of.

Use the [Prioritisation Grid](#) and [Progress Tracker](#) to input the suggested actions from the following lists to plot out your workplace's action plan.





Key area: Strategy and planning

Think of this as the foundation. It's about weaving the values of gender equality, safety, and respect into your strategic planning and decision-making from the start, not just adding it on later.

START

Set the baseline (plans, policies, standards)

Know and meet your legal responsibilities

You've got a legal responsibility to take proactive steps to prevent gender-based violence, not just respond when something goes wrong. Here are some ways to make sure your work environment (in-person or online) doesn't create risks to someone's mental health, wellbeing, or safety:

- Know your legal obligations, including the positive duty under Respect@Work changes to the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and anti-discrimination legislations.
- Stay across WHS requirements, including how to manage psychosocial risks like bullying, stress, isolation, and unsafe power dynamics.
- Integrate psychosocial risk management into your WHS systems covering physical and digital safety, contractor and client interactions, and clear, accessible reporting pathways.
- Update your risk management systems to include psychosocial hazards and reporting pathways.

- Understand what's required for paid family and domestic violence leave. Since mid-2025, all affected employees, including casuals, are entitled to 10 days of paid leave upfront. Check the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) for details.

Formally record your commitment to gender equality, safety, and respect

Develop and communicate clear, accessible workplace policies and a code of conduct. Make sure relevant documents address anti-harassment, discrimination, and psychosocial safety. Ensure they're easy to find, written in plain language, and supported by visuals and practical guides. Include clear reporting channels and consequences. Regularly reinforce them through leadership conversations and reminders, making them part of everyday culture.

Investing in learning

Investing your people's confidence around gender equality, safety, and respect is one of the best things you can do for your business. Think of it as building long-term capability, not just ticking off training. Here's how you can build knowledge and confidence around gender equality, safety and respect in a small workplace:

- Include topics like preventing and responding to harassment, bullying, microaggressions, racism, and bias in team inductions, toolbox talks, or regular staff meetings.
- Work with trusted external trainers or advisors who can provide credible, evidence-based, and culturally informed sessions.
- Set a shared baseline of understanding for everyone, leaders and staff alike, and check in regularly to make sure learning sticks.
- Set aside some time and budget for ongoing learning and reflection—it sends a clear message that gender equality, safety, and respect are part of how you do business, not just an add-on.



Review your policies and practices using an equality lens

Make sure your workplace policies, systems, and programs don't exclude or disadvantage anyone. Update them to address bias or discrimination related to gender, race, age, disability, or sexuality.

Respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols

Learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols and follow those relevant to your local area and community.

Why these actions matter

Creating a safe, fair, and respectful workplace isn't just about compliance, it's about people. When gender equality, safety, and respect are part of how you do business, everyone benefits. Employees feel valued and supported, teams work better together, and productivity and retention improve.

Taking proactive steps also protects your business from legal and reputational risk. It shows your team, clients, and community that you take gender equality, safety, and respect seriously. It demonstrates your commitment to doing what's right, not just what's required.

In small workplaces, these actions have an even greater impact. With fewer people, culture is shaped quickly and the behaviour of one person can set the tone for everyone. Leading with respect and fairness helps create a workplace where people want to stay, grow, and contribute their best.

MOVE TO

Signal values and extend beyond employees

Develop and share a clear, values-based statement

Put together a statement on gender equality, safety, and respect that reflects your organisation's culture and commitments. Display it on your website, onboarding materials, email signatures, and wherever people connect with your brand.

Embed gender equality, safety, and respect into your business strategy

- Create a gender equality, safety, and respect action plan, or include these goals within your existing diversity or people strategy to ensure accountability and alignment with your legal duties.
- Make disability inclusion a key focus area within your plan, recognising the intersecting experiences of women with disabilities and others who may face multiple barriers.
- Equip leaders and managers with the tools, training, and support needed to lead inclusively and foster safe, respectful teams.
- Access free resources from the Australian Government's [JobAccess](#) portal to help design, implement, and measure your inclusion actions.

Integrate equality and respect into decision-making at every level

Make sure business, staffing, and operational decisions actively consider gender equality, safety, and respect.

Set goals for fairness and diversity in hiring and promotion

Commit to building a workplace that reflects different backgrounds and experiences by weaving gender equality and diversity into your business planning and leadership priorities.



Recognise and reward respectful leadership

Celebrate leaders and team members who model gender equality, safety, and respect, reinforcing that these values are central to business success.

GO FURTHER

Formalise, resource, and influence

Check in on your culture regularly

- Once or twice a year, take time to assess how gender equal, safe, and respectful your workplace feels.
- Ask your employees what's working well and where improvements can be made.

Review your data and use it to drive action

Monitor gender balance, pay equity, promotions, leadership diversity, and complaints. Use this information to identify gaps, address risks such as harassment, bullying, and discrimination, and ensure women, people with disabilities, and others from diverse backgrounds are represented in leadership and decision-making.

Be open about your progress

Share regular updates with your leadership team (and board, if you have one) on how you're tracking. These are some useful things to include:

- Training completed on gender equality, safety, and respect.
- Gender balance across roles, pay, and promotions.
- How complaints were managed and lessons learned.
- Any new initiatives or policy changes that support equality and respect.
- Progress against your gender equality and safety action plan or similar goals.

Share your successes and lessons learned

Use newsletters, social media, or industry networks to highlight what's working and inspire others to create respectful, inclusive workplaces.

Collaborate for broader impact

Partner with peers, suppliers, and industry bodies to promote equality, host events, and champion positive change together.

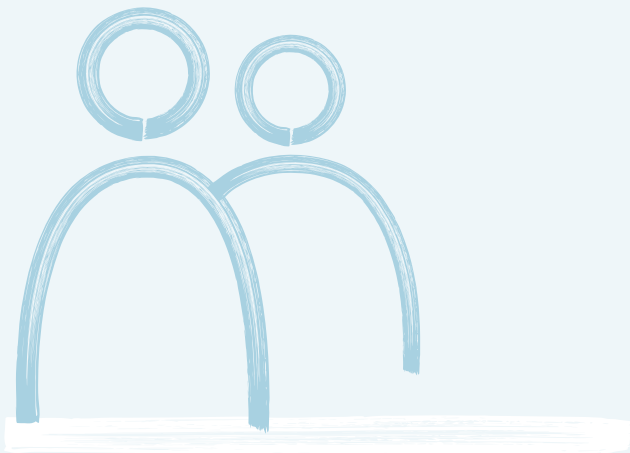
Use your influence for good

- Encourage clients, customers, and partners to adopt similar practices.
- Advocate for inclusive industry standards and ethical supply chains.

Sustain the cycle

Keep prevention, respect, and equality on your agenda.

- Review and refresh your gender equality and safety action plan, or the inclusion of these goals within your existing diversity or people strategy, annually.
- Celebrate milestones and communicate improvements internally and externally.



Key area: Workplace culture

Culture is what people feel and experience every day at work. It's shaped by leadership, systems, and behaviours. Create an environment where promoting gender equality, safety, and respect is clearly expected, consistently modelled by leaders, and backed up by policies, training, and accountability at every level.

START

Make respectful behaviour a daily habit

Lead by example by making respect and equality visible every day

Leaders set the cultural tone. Show through words and actions that respect, gender equality and safety are central to how your organisation operates:

- Speak openly and often about gender equality, safety, and respect in meetings, events, and internal communications.
- Share authentic reflections or experiences that demonstrate personal commitment.
- Model gender equality, safety, and respect in all interactions with staff, clients, suppliers, and collaborators.
- Reinforce respectful values through regular communication channels like newsletters, blogs, or short video messages.
- Hold yourself and others accountable for upholding standards, showing that gender equality and respect are not optional but core to your culture.

Promote a culture of inclusion through language

- Apply gender-inclusive and accessible wording in emails, policies, signage, and team discussions. Small changes, like using *they/them* instead of *he/she* when referring to someone in general, make a big difference.
- Avoid terms that may exclude or stereotype people based on disability, race, or age (e.g., *tone deaf*, *lame excuse*, *senior moment*). Choose language that reflects respect and awareness.
- Encourage staff to share pronouns in introductions or email signatures if they're comfortable. This helps everyone feel seen and respected.
- Develop a simple one-page reference (or adapt an existing guide) to help staff choose respectful and identity-affirming words and images.
- Regularly check your policies, templates, and communication materials — including your website and marketing content — to ensure they use inclusive language and imagery. Use photos, examples, and stories that represent the different backgrounds, genders, and abilities within your workplace and community.
- Encourage managers and team leads to model inclusive, respectful communication—especially in meetings, feedback, and casual conversations. When leaders do it, it becomes part of the everyday culture.



Make flexibility a part of everyday culture so everyone feels supported to balance work and life

- Ensure staff know their leave and flexible work options, including paid family and domestic violence leave.
- Leaders should model flexible work and share how it supports their wellbeing, study, or volunteering.

Nurture an environment of trust and safety

- Encourage open, honest conversations about behaviour and make sure reporting feels supportive, fair, and free from judgement or fear.
- Make sure workplace displays 'how to speak up' guidance and provides access to confidential or anonymous reporting channels.

Promote cultural awareness, safety, and respect

Create a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other diverse communities.

- Begin meetings and events with an Acknowledgment of Country.
- Consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and diverse communities when developing policies and programs.
- Celebrate cultural events and provide cultural competency training for all staff.

Why these actions matter

These actions help create a workplace where everyone feels safe, respected, and valued every day. In a small organisation, culture is built through daily interactions, and the behaviour of a few people can set the tone for everyone. By making gender equality, safety, and respect part of how you lead, communicate, and make decisions, you strengthen trust, teamwork, and wellbeing.

Taking these steps also shows that respect isn't just a policy, it's who you are as a business. It builds your reputation, helps attract and retain great people, and shows your team, clients, and community that you care about doing what's right.

Small, consistent actions like these make respect part of your workplace DNA and something people feel every day.



MOVE TO

Consistency, participation, shared ownership

Foster a culture that celebrates real diversity

Make sure your website, materials, and marketing reflect the true mix of people in your community: different genders, cultures, abilities, and ages. Avoid stereotypes and show authentic representation that reflects who you are as a workplace. Include diversity statements in job ads, contractor briefs, and procurement documents.

Build a culture of shared values through partnerships

- Work with suppliers, clients, and collaborators who genuinely align with your values on gender equality, safety, and respect.
- Be transparent about expectations and regularly review relationships to ensure values are upheld. When values guide partnerships, trust and accountability follow.

Nurture a culture of wellbeing and trust

- Check in regularly through quick surveys, informal chats, or anonymous feedback, to understand how your team is feeling.
- Share what you learn, act on it, to show that wellbeing and psychosocial safety are priorities.
- Include 'respect check-ins' in regular meetings to reinforce shared values.

Embed a culture of care in complaint handling

- Make sure anyone managing complaints is trained to respond with empathy, fairness, and confidentiality.
- Provide ongoing support so they can handle sensitive issues with confidence and care.

Build a culture of inclusion at every event

Choose venues and activities that welcome everyone and include accessible spaces, quiet areas, safe transport options, alcohol-free choices, and inclusive catering. Use tools like the [Disability Gateway](#) to guide planning.

Encourage a culture of open, honest dialogue

In teams where culture needs strengthening, create space to talk about what respect looks like day to day. Use regular 'respect check-ins' to keep these conversations meaningful and ongoing.

Bring respect to life everyday

Talk about your policies in team meetings, use real examples to show how they work, and invite questions. This helps everyone understand and live your values, not just read about them.



GO FURTHER

Transparency, partnership, and shared accountability**Foster a culture of genuine respect and partnership**

Foster genuine respect by working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in meaningful, collaborative ways. Make cultural safety part of everyday practice through co-designed programs that reflect true representation, not tokenism.

Build a workplace where feedback is welcomed, acted on, and leads to real change

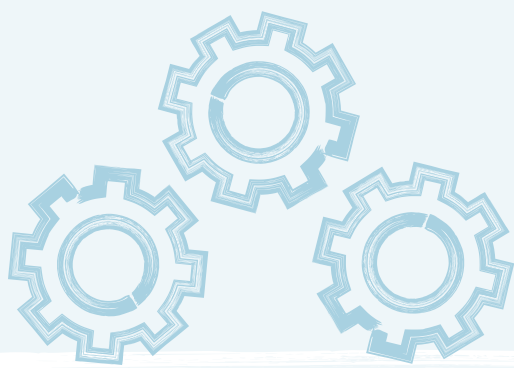
Build trust by showing how feedback leads to action. Review input regularly, communicate what's changing, and make the process visible. Leaders should be clear about what's heard and how it's being addressed. Closing the loop strengthens accountability and workplace culture.

Foster learning and accountability

- Build a culture where everyone feels confident addressing bias and disrespect.
- Embed learning on respect, inclusion, and cultural awareness into everyday practice.

Nurture a culture of care and support

Make sure everyone knows where to go for help, like 1800RESPECT or your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and that managers respond with empathy and care. Share support information regularly so it's easy to find when needed.



Key area: Everyday operations

This is about putting gender equality, safety, and respect into action. It looks at how to do this across everything you do, from how you deliver services and choose suppliers, to how your teams work and make decisions.

START

Put the core systems in place

Keep policies fair, inclusive, and practical

Review your leave and flexibility options regularly to make sure they work for everyone. Use inclusive language (like 'parental leave'), make flexibility available to all staff, and ensure everyone knows about their entitlements, including paid family and domestic violence leave.

Treat sexual harassment as a preventable workplace risk

This means recognising sexual harassment as a work health and safety issue. You can take practical steps to reduce risks related to sexual harassment in your workplace:

- Record sexual harassment as a risk in your WHS discussions or documentation.
- Talk with your team about where risks might occur, such as when working alone or dealing with clients, and agree on simple ways to reduce them.

- Set clear expectations for respectful behaviour and design for safety where possible (buddy systems, safe transport, or designated contacts).

Create a reporting process that feels safe, fair, and simple

Make it easy for people to raise concerns and know they'll be supported. Include clear information in onboarding materials and team handbooks, and train managers to respond with empathy, consistency, and fairness.

Keep track of what's really happening

Use simple methods like check-ins or short surveys to understand how your team is feeling. Keep basic, confidential notes about issues raised and how they were handled and look for patterns to guide improvement.

Build confidence and skills for respectful workplaces

Run short, practical learning sessions in meetings or toolbox talks. Use real examples and open discussions to help people recognise respectful behaviour and know how to speak up safely.

Be clear that violence, discrimination, and harassment have no place here

Include expectations and consequences in your code of conduct, discuss them in meetings, and make sure responses are fair, trauma-informed, and supportive of those affected.

Ensure your workplace is inclusive and accessible

Check that spaces, systems, and equipment work for everyone. This might involve gender-inclusive bathrooms, accessible facilities, and adaptive Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where needed. Encourage feedback and act on it promptly.



Work with values-aligned partners

Choose suppliers, contractors, and collaborators who share your commitment to equality, safety, and respect. Include respectful conduct expectations in contracts and agreements.

Keep respect visible

Open meetings with a short values reminder, share stories that highlight gender equality, safety, and respect, and make these conversations a regular part of how you work.

Strengthen recruitment and onboarding by eliminating bias and embedding gender equality and respect from the start

Lay the foundation for a fair and inclusive workplace by ensuring every hiring decision reflects your organisation's commitment to equality and respect.

- Review recruitment processes to resource and build an intersectional approach at every stage, from job design to onboarding.
- Use structured interview processes and consistent questions, and ensure job advertisements and hiring practices are inclusive—unless lawful exemptions apply (for example, Aboriginality, disability, gender).
- Focus on the inherent requirements of each role and clearly communicate your commitment to reasonable accommodations.
- Reinforce your organisation's commitments to gender equality, safety and respect during induction and onboarding to embed respectful workplace values from day one.

Why these actions matter

Policies that promote gender equality, safety, and respect help everyone feel safe and supported at work. Treating sexual harassment as a preventable risk builds safer systems and stronger trust.

Simple, empathetic reporting processes and open conversations show that wellbeing and respect are real priorities.

Regular learning, inclusive spaces, and values-aligned partnerships make respect visible every day and show that equality is part of how your workplace operates.



MOVE TO

Strengthen, co-design, and expand scope

Keep policies fair and evolving

Introduce additional inclusive options like equal parental leave, cultural or gender-affirming leave, or floating public holidays. Review flexibility and leave policies with staff input to ensure they stay relevant.

Treat sexual harassment as a formal WHS risk

Add it to your risk register, review regularly, and involve staff in identifying risk areas and improving prevention strategies.

Strengthen safe reporting

Add extra ways to report concerns, such as anonymous forms or third-party hotlines and review reporting processes with staff to ensure they're trusted and easy to use.

Track and learn from culture data

Use a simple system or spreadsheet to record anonymised data on wellbeing and complaints. Review this information annually to identify trends and guide improvements.

Deepen learning and inclusion

- Offer role-based bystander training to help staff respond safely to disrespectful behaviour.
- Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led or specialist organisations for training on inclusion, racism, and cultural safety.

Review your practices and partnerships

Each year, assess how your operations, communications, and service delivery align with your values. Update messaging and relationships where needed, and share improvements with your team.

Embed accessibility in daily operations

- Review your workplace and digital systems regularly for inclusion and accessibility.
- Invite feedback from people with lived experience of exclusion, such as racial, gender, disability, or cultural marginalisation, to uncover gaps in awareness and strengthen inclusion practices. Resource this process meaningfully, ensuring participants are supported and their insights are valued. Communicate openly about what is learned, including what changes will and won't be made, to build trust and accountability.

Extend your partnerships

Engage suppliers who prioritise diversity and equity, and include cultural safety expectations in agreements.

Keep communication open

Share feedback summaries, highlight actions taken, and show that speaking up leads to change.



GO FURTHER

Integrate, publish, and lead

Regularly review policies for gender equality, safety, and respect

Use staff input and external advice where possible to ensure your policies meet evolving standards and community expectations. Be transparent about what's changing and why.

Conduct regular WHS risk assessments

Include sexual harassment, discrimination, and psychosocial hazards in formal assessments. Involve external advisors if needed and use findings to strengthen prevention.

Build full transparency in reporting

Share anonymised updates on what's been learned and improved from reports or complaints. Show staff and stakeholders that accountability and care are part of how you operate.

Review data and share progress

Publish de-identified summaries of workplace trends and improvements. Demonstrate openness and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Invest in ongoing learning and leadership development

Provide advanced bystander or cultural safety training for managers and high-risk teams. Reinforce respect and inclusion through regular refreshers and leadership coaching.

Strengthen digital safety

Start by listing the communication tools staff use and checking which features could be misused, as well as who has access to them. Identify higher-risk tools, such as those that allow instant or unmonitored contact, and update your policies and settings to promote respectful behaviour and prevent misuse. Make reporting simple by clearly identifying who staff can speak to and how concerns are handled, and provide brief guidance on safe and respectful online conduct. Finally, review new tools before introducing them and revisit your digital safety settings each year to ensure they stay fit for purpose.

Maintain annual reviews of equity and accessibility

Use tools like the [CBM Gender and Disability Analysis Toolkit](#) to identify gaps and priorities. Share progress with your team and set measurable goals for improvement.

Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses

Build respectful, long-term relationships with Indigenous suppliers through platforms like [Supply Nation](#). Embed cultural and gender equality goals into your supply chain.

Keep respect visible and close the loop

Share stories of change, celebrate progress, and show how feedback shapes decisions. This transparency builds trust and makes respect part of your brand and reputation.



PART 3

Further reading

Our Watch

[Workplace Equality and Respect](#)

[Taking an intersectional approach](#)

[Creating safe-to-speak cultures](#)

[Toolkit for Managing Resistance and Mitigating Risk in Workplace Equality and Respect Initiatives](#)

[Toolkit: Engaging leaders to prevent gender-based violence in the workplace](#)

[Bystander action](#)

[Learning briefs: Engaging employers in preventing workplace sexual harassment](#)

[Toolkit: Communicating safety, gender equality and respect in the workplace](#)

[Addressing customer and client-perpetrated sexual harassment](#)

[Creating safe, equal and respectful workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women: A beginners guide](#)

[Creating safety, equality, inclusion and respect for women with disabilities in the workplace: A guide](#)

[Am I ready? starter scan](#)

[Fact sheet: Great practice in collecting and analysing diversity data](#)

[FAQs: Collecting and analysing data](#)

[Tip sheet: Designing workplace equality and respect surveys](#)

[Tip sheet: Running employee focus groups](#)





Australian Human Rights Commission

[Guidelines for complying with the positive duty](#)

[Information guide on the positive duty](#)

[A resource for small business on the positive duty](#)

[Fact sheets and other resources](#)

[Speaking from experience: What needs to change to address workplace sexual harassment](#)

[Workplace sexual harassment resources](#)

Australian Institute of Company Directors

[Positive duty to prevent workplace sexual harassment — a director's guide](#)

Champions of Change Coalition

[FOCUSED on everyday respect](#)

[7 switches: A guide for inclusive gender equality by design](#)

[Power to create inclusive gender equality in the workplace](#)

[In the eye of the beholder: Avoiding the merit trap](#)

[Building confidence and trust in workplace responses to sexual harassment](#)

[Sexual harassment](#)

Safe Work Australia

[Model Code of Practice: Sexual and gender-based harassment](#)

[Resources on workplace sexual harassment](#)

Fair Work Commission

[Family and domestic violence leave](#)

Pride in Diversity

[Australian Workplace Equality Index](#)

Rainbow Health Australia

[Pride in Prevention Evidence Guide](#)

Workplace Gender Equality Agency

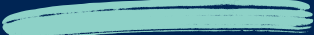
[Action Planning Playbook](#)

[Action Planning Tool](#)

Endnotes

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- 5 Novacek, Gabrielle. (2024). An Inclusive Workplace Is Good for Business, Boston Consulting Group <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2024/an-inclusive-workplace-is-good-for-business>
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- 8 Deloitte Access Economics. (2019). The economic costs of sexual harassment in the workplace <https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-zone1/au/en/docs/services/economics/deloitte-au-economic-costs-sexual-harassment-workplace-240320.pdf>
- 9 Gutiérrez, D., Castaño, A. (2021). Gender Equality in the Workplace: Key Driver of Well-Being, Business Performance and Sustainability. *Aligning Perspectives in Gender Mainstreaming. Aligning Perspectives on Health, Safety and Well-Being*.
- 10 Novacek, Gabrielle. (2024), see note 5.

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**Our
Watch**

Preventing violence
against women