

**ATSE**

Australian Academy of  
Technological Sciences  
& Engineering

# Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit

For science and technology  
focused small and medium  
sized enterprises (SMEs)



## Diversity and inclusion in science and technology focused SMEs

**Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are vitally important to Australia's economy. SMEs contribute over 57 per cent of Australia's GDP and are responsible for creating almost 7 million jobs.<sup>1</sup>**

At 12 per cent of all Australian businesses, science- and technology-focused SMEs employ almost 80 per cent of the nation's total professional, scientific and technical industry workforce.<sup>2</sup>

To attract the best talent, and to create vibrant, creative, high functioning and resilient workforces, it is important that Australia's small and medium businesses embrace people from a range of cultural backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, and abilities.



But feedback from the Academy's stakeholders show that many businesses struggle to attract and retain a gender-balanced and diverse workforce.

Australia's university-qualified STEM graduates represent a rich diversity of cultures, ethnicities and languages but still falls short in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation. 57 per cent of graduates are born overseas, 45 percent speaking a language other than English at home.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, STEM qualified individuals born overseas are twice as likely to be unemployed than people born in Australia, leaving much of this extraordinary potential untapped.

#### Unemployment rates of STEM qualified people

Source: Office of Chief Scientist (2020). Australia's STEM workforce



Women in STEM are also almost twice as likely to be unemployed than men, and when they are employed, they usually have lower incomes than their male colleagues.<sup>4</sup> Understanding the many benefits to companies that proactively support diversity and inclusion is an important first step for many STEM-focused businesses.

This Toolkit lays out the 'What' and 'Why' of diversity and inclusion, before we dive into the 'How'.

## About us

The Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (ATSE) is a Learned Academy of independent experts that helps Australians understand and use technology to solve complex problems. We bring together Australia's leaders in applied science, technology and engineering to provide impartial, practical and evidence-based advice on how to achieve sustainable solutions and advance prosperity.

ATSE has a commitment to improving diversity and inclusion in science, engineering, technology and maths (STEM). We have developed the Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit for STEM-focused SMEs (the Toolkit) to support, encourage and enable STEM small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to create diverse and inclusive workplaces.

**Using this Toolkit will provide SMEs resources that support and enable your businesses to reap the economic and social benefits of diversity and inclusion.**

To attract the best talent, and to create vibrant, creative, high functioning and resilient workforces, it is important that Australia's small and medium businesses embrace people from a range of cultural backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, and abilities.



# The 'What'

## What is Diversity?

Diversity refers to the differences between people and how a person identifies in relation to key dimensions including, but not limited to, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, age, and ability.

A diverse workplace understands that each individual is unique, and recognises and celebrates individual differences.

These differences are reflective of Australia's diverse community, and the recognition of these individual differences is a crucial step towards creating a respectful and inclusive workplace.

## What is Inclusion?

Inclusion is a related but separate concept from diversity.

An inclusive workplace is one in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully and have equal and equitable access to opportunities and resources.

An inclusive culture is about creating a sense of belonging, where every employee feels valued, and respected and that they have a place or belonging within the business.



# The ‘Why’

**There are three key reasons for businesses to make a commitment to a culture of diversity and inclusion in their workplace.**

## 1. BOOST YOUR PERFORMANCE

Small businesses with established cultures of diversity and inclusion outperform businesses without. Research shows that organisations with an inclusive culture are twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

Diverse organisations are more profitable and creative, and have better governance. Employees from diverse backgrounds bring different lived experiences, ideas, and perspectives to their work, boosting the overall creativity and resilience of the business, and supporting it to outperform businesses that do not invest in diversity. Bringing together employees with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives also makes businesses more innovative and better at solving complex problems. Companies with gender and cultural diversity are more likely to have financial returns above national industry average – it’s clear that diversity is good for business.<sup>6</sup>

Having a gender-inclusive and diverse leadership group improves market value and profits. Increasing the number of women in key management positions by 10 per cent or more leads to an average 6.6 per cent increase in market value of Australian ASX listed companies<sup>7</sup>, while companies with ethnically and culturally diverse boards are 43 per cent more likely to experience higher profits.<sup>8</sup>

Having a D&I policy and associated actions might improve your chance of winning work with major clients. Increasingly, clients in Australia

want to work with businesses that are aligned to their values. Large private companies, and federal, state, and local governments, can leverage procurement to support social policy and demonstrate their commitment to D&I. This means that some major purchasers will ask their business partners and contractors to provide evidence of a commitment to D&I, and to include actions within their tender responses that provide explicit benefits to these areas.

Employees who feel celebrated at work and who know their employer is committed to diversity, are more innovative, collaborative, and responsive to changing customer needs.<sup>9</sup> Research has found that when just 10 per cent more employees feel valued and have a place within the business, work attendance increases by almost one day per year, for every employee.

Promoting diversity, preventing discrimination, and providing a safe and respectful workplace has real and direct benefits to the health and wellbeing of all employees. There is strong evidence that discrimination leads to higher rates of poor health, particularly for mental health and wellbeing, leading to anxiety, depression, and stress.<sup>11</sup>

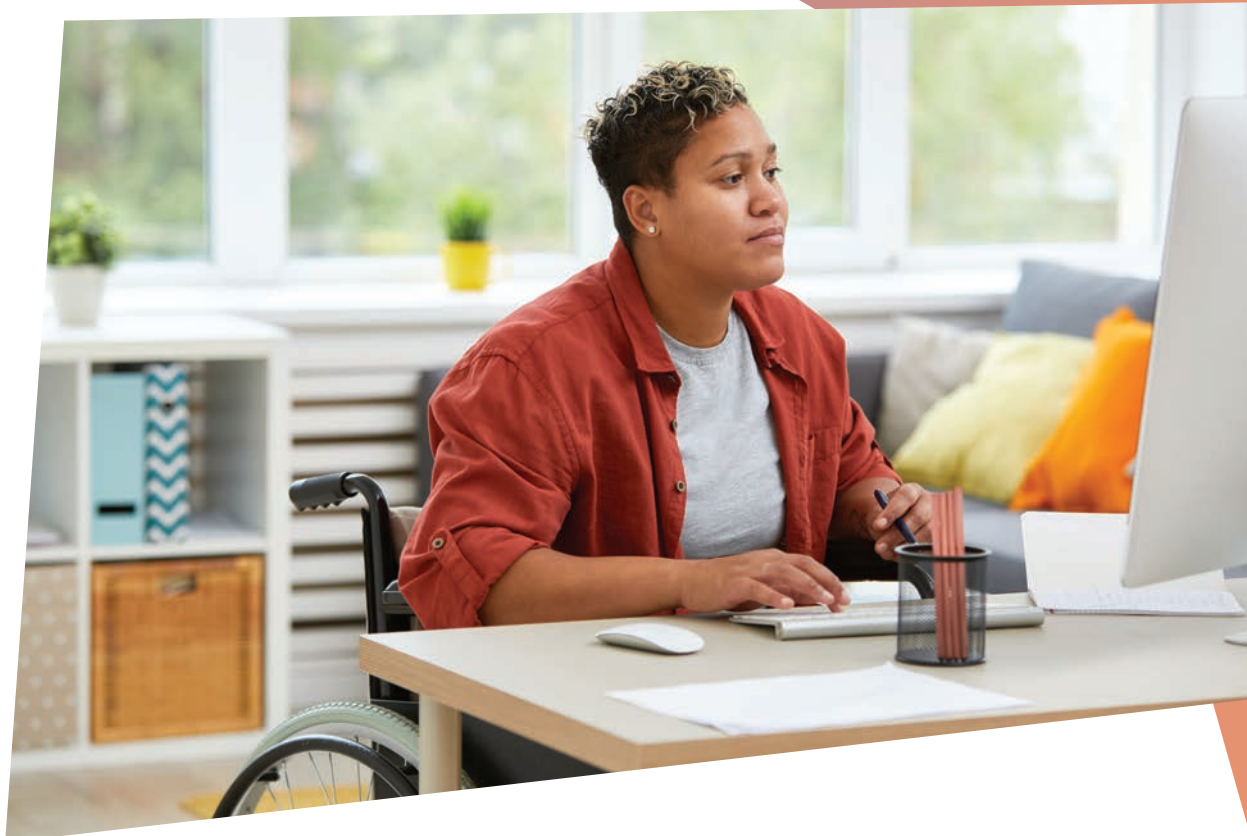
By committing to a workplace that is free of discrimination and bias, and by providing equitable access to support, opportunities and resources, SMEs can capture the growth benefits of diversity and create the kind of workplace where employees are motivated to perform their best.

## 2. LEGAL IMPERATIVE

In Australia, all employers have a legal obligation to prevent discrimination in the workplace. State and Commonwealth anti-discrimination laws make it unlawful to discriminate, harass, victimise, or vilify an individual on the basis of specific characteristics.<sup>12</sup> It is also unlawful to bully someone in the workplace.<sup>13</sup>

There are significant consequences for breaching these laws. The NSW Anti-Discrimination Tribunal estimated the average costs of resolving a serious or complex complaint to be \$35,000, including wages and lost productivity.<sup>14</sup>

Discrimination complaints can also seriously damage the reputation of a business, which can harm the ability to attract and retain staff, and reduce productivity. An estimated 70 per cent of workers exposed to violence, harassment or discrimination take time off work as a result.<sup>15</sup>



### 3. MORAL IMPERATIVE

Providing fair and equal opportunities to all people is the right thing to do. Companies committed to diversity and inclusivity ensure a safe, fair, and equitable workplace free of bias by removing discriminatory behaviour, language and practices from their corporate values and codes of conduct.

Underlying the moral imperative of doing the right thing is the evidence that employees are happier, safer, and more productive working in diverse and inclusive spaces. Inclusion isn't a meaningless buzzword, it has real and direct benefits to both workers and employers.

The DCA-Suncorp Inclusion@Work Index 2017-2018, which surveyed 3000 working Australians, found that inclusion at work amplifies team performance and boosts employee satisfaction, success, and security, as well as minimising the risk of harassment and discrimination.<sup>16</sup>

The survey also found that those working in a diverse and inclusive team are 19 times more likely to be satisfied with their job and 4 times more likely to stay with their employer than those in non-inclusive teams.<sup>17</sup>

Australian businesses have a clear opportunity to proactively engage their workforce to contribute to building inclusive workplace cultures.

# The ‘How’

**This Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit for science and technology-focused small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is comprised of three quick reference guides – RECRUIT, RETAIN and REACH – that businesses can use to embed diversity and inclusion in their culture and operations when recruiting, retaining and developing their employee workforce.**

## How to Use the Quick Reference Guides

Improving diversity and inclusion in small businesses requires change through learning and development. This Toolkit provides tools, resources, and advice to build on existing skills and capability.

### RECRUIT

Designed to help SME leaders understand and address barriers and opportunities to attracting diverse talent.

Provides suggestions and resources to ensure recruitment processes are inclusive and accessible, to improve diversity in applicants and shortlisted candidates.

### RETAIN

Discusses different approaches to making the workplace more inclusive and accessible, to ensure STEM SMEs can retain a diverse workforce.

Most effective when SMEs have implemented appropriate steps of the RECRUIT guide.

### REACH

Helps STEM SMEs ensure that their promotional activities are inclusive.

Guides SME leaders to adopt benchmark promotional and professional development opportunities to all employees.

Most effective when SMEs have implemented appropriate steps of the RECRUIT and RETAIN guides.

All SMEs and start-ups are unique in terms of size, capacity, function and make-up, and each organisation will use these guides in a different way.

You can apply the guides in a way that best suits your organisation: some components of the Toolkit may not be applicable.

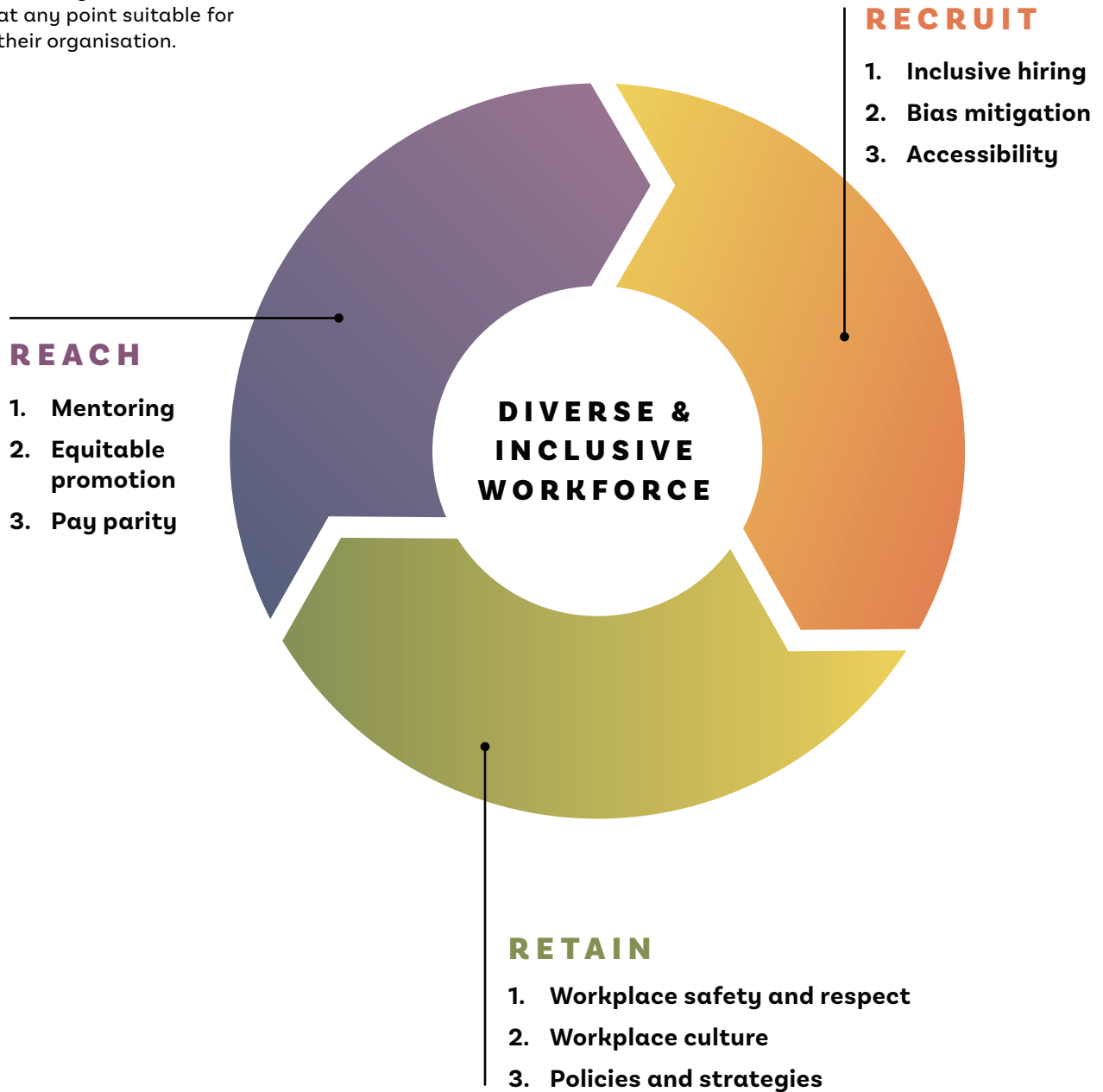
Work through the quick reference guides at your own pace and implement practices that are appropriate to the needs and abilities of your organisation.



FIGURE 1

## Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit pathway

This Toolkit outlines a process towards embedding diversity and inclusion as a core principle within a business. Businesses are encouraged to take action at any point suitable for their organisation.



# RECRUIT

**Small and medium businesses in Australia on average have fewer than five employees<sup>18</sup> which means it is imperative that efforts towards diversity and inclusion be considered at every stage of the recruitment process to maintain a diverse workplace.**

Research shows that potential employees are unlikely to apply for a job if an employer does not demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion. On average, 39 per cent of people wouldn't apply for a job if they think the workplace is not inclusive.<sup>19</sup> Ensuring your recruitment practices are inclusive and non-discriminatory can encourage a diverse pool of applicants, increasing the likelihood of filling the role with an applicant who brings different skills and experience to your business.

Small businesses in the STEM sector face unique barriers and opportunities to recruiting diverse talent. Australia's STEM workforce has significant cultural diversity and neurodiversity, but falls short in other areas. Less than 30 per cent of the university qualified STEM workforce are women, while Indigenous peoples and people with a disability are also underrepresented.

The ability for small businesses to increase diversity will vary, depending on the business's size, resources, and growth capacity.

The small business community itself is diverse and there are different pathways that individual businesses can take to improve diversity through inclusive recruitment.

This guide provides a range of steps that small and medium businesses can take to ensure their hiring and recruitment practices are inclusive and will attract the best person for the job.

## Track your progress

Tick as you go

- 1. Planning for recruitment
- 2. Writing a job description
- 3. Advertising
- 4. Accepting applications
- 5. Shortlisting
- 6. Interviewing
- 7. Making an offer





## Creating an inclusive recruitment strategy

Small businesses in the STEM sector face a unique set of challenges when it comes to recruiting talent.

**There are financial barriers to fully accessing the domestic and international talent pool; SMEs are competing with much bigger organisation in a time of high demand for niche or interdisciplinary skills; and there's increasing competition for skilled employees.**

**To ensure your recruitment practices are inclusive and provide the best access to talent, create a recruitment strategy that outlines a clear and defined process of recruitment that encompasses some, or all, of the following steps outlined in this guide.**

## ● Planning for recruitment

Small businesses undertake recruitment in different ways depending on individual business needs. Many businesses undertake in-house recruitment, while some may hire a recruitment agent to undertake various recruitment tasks such as shortlisting applicants. Small businesses should consider the benefits of each approach to decide the best way to recruit diverse talent.

### In-house recruitment

Employers undertaking in-house recruitment are legally obligated to provide a fair process. If there is evidence of discrimination during the recruitment process you may be held liable. However, meeting your legal obligation to not discriminate is a minimum requirement, and alone is not enough to ensure your recruitment process attracts a rich and diverse field of candidates. For more information about your legal obligations, we suggest you start with:

[> Learn more about vicarious liability<sup>20</sup>](#)

When recruiting for a new position, be sure to inform your current employees including those on parental leave, sick leave or long service leave, to allow existing employees to apply for new opportunities. Consider including a diversity statement at the end of your advertisement calling for applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, people living with disabilities, or gender diverse people.

### Recruitment agencies

Recruitment agents play an important role in preventing discrimination during recruitment. Agents cannot act on discriminatory requests from employers which relate to a person's age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or disability. Recruitment agencies can improve the diversity of applicants by working with your business to determine only relevant and inclusive key selection criteria for the job, and by sharing a diverse pool of applicants with the employer.

Employers using recruitment agencies could consider:

- Including **refugee employment services<sup>21</sup>** and diversity recruiters such as **Work180<sup>22</sup>** in the list of recruitment companies you use, as this will allow you to access candidates who may be missed through conventional recruitment processes.
- Consider requesting de-identified applications through your recruiter. This approach can prevent unconscious bias or affinity bias against applicants based on their gender, ethnicity, or cultural background during the recruitment process. When discussing this approach with your recruitment agent, make sure to identify that diversity and gender balance of candidates is important to your business,

## CASE STUDY

**Recruit Smarter** is a multi-sector initiative of the Victorian Government to develop inclusive recruitment practices and address unconscious bias in recruitment. Results from the two-year trial across 46 participant organisations found that CV de-identification increased hiring rates for women, overseas-born workers and applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds, by up to 9 per cent.



## ● Writing a job description

**Creating a job description is an important step in hiring, and it is important that key roles and responsibilities of the job are clearly outlined.**

This helps applicants to easily identify what information you need and so that they can tailor their application accordingly. It also ensures that you do not seek unnecessary or potentially discriminatory information from applicants.

Employers can also use the free job description template from the [Fair Work Ombudsman’s Hiring Employees](#) website.<sup>26</sup>

When writing a job description, employers should:

- Use plain English.
- Remove any reference to physical characteristics such as age, ethnicity, or gender from the job description.

- Outline the duties and responsibilities of the role, and clearly identify ‘desirable’ and ‘essential’ criteria.
- Consider removing non-essential criteria that might deter some applicants, particularly skills which can be taught on the job, such as machinery operation license, a Working with Children Check, or experience using specific software.
- Indicate how the job (and the organisation) have a positive impact (for example, on the community, on the environment, or in the industry) as research shows that women are more likely to apply for jobs within organisations that contribute positively to society.
- Highlight flexible and remote working options, as these may attract candidates with caring, family, or community responsibilities.

Employers should also ensure the job description does not contain gendered or discriminatory language, which is likely to deter applicants. You can use free online tools such as [Gender Decoder](#)<sup>27</sup> to detect gendered language in your job descriptions.

Masculine terms	Non-gendered alternatives
Lead	Head, steer, manage, grow
Drive	Inspire, steer, guide
Strong	Sound, demonstrated, excellent
Analytical	Thorough, systematic, deductive
Proven	Established, trusted, successful
Decisive	Assured, purposeful
Ambitious	Goal-oriented, enthusiastic

### Attracting talent

According to research from [StartupAus](#)<sup>23</sup>, the biggest barrier to start-up growth is talent attraction, and Australian start-ups are increasingly relying on skilled migrants to fill key roles. StartupAus also found that skilled migrants are linked to the creation of high-value technology businesses, with more than 50 per cent of the most successful Australian founders in the last 10 years being first- or second-generation migrants.<sup>24</sup>

When recruiting, be open to individuals who have relevant skills or work experience from another country. Refugees and people from other countries are sometimes overlooked if they do not have Australian experience, despite being qualified with skills and experience. By discounting these applicants, recruiters often overlook a potential pool of locally available talent.

[Humans Like Us](#) provides a comprehensive set of resources<sup>25</sup> for employers looking to welcome refugees and migrants into their workforce.

### CASE STUDY

#### Inclusive job descriptions

An Australian manufacturing company was struggling to attract female recruits for an entry-level position. The job description called for a forklift driver’s licence, which they discovered very few women hold.

After receiving no women applicants, the company reviewed the job ad and realised that forklift operation was a skill that could easily be taught on the job, so the requirement was removed from the advertisement. The following year, 40 per cent of applicants were women, rising to 50 per cent the year after.

## ● Advertising

**Having a diverse pool of applicants increases the likelihood of finding the best person for the job.**

Advertising a role is a critical step in ensuring your applicant pool is diverse, and that the role is filled successfully.

Employers have a legal obligation to ensure advertisements do not contain discriminatory content.

There are several strategies employers can use to ensure job advertisements are inclusive by design:

1. Ensure the job advertisement uses gender-neutral language and avoids making assumptions about marital status or age. Research shows that using gendered language in job ads can result in fewer applications from women. You can ensure your job ads are gender-neutral by:
  - a. Using free online tools such as [Gender Decoder](#)<sup>29</sup> to detect gendered language in your job advertisements.
  - b. Reading the [Australian Human Rights Commission's Guidelines for Writing and Publishing Recruitment Advertisements](#).<sup>30</sup>
  - c. Reading the [Words at Work](#)<sup>31</sup> guide to inclusive language by Diversity Council Australia.

2. Offer to negotiate flexible arrangements with the successful candidate. This could include flexible work hours to account for school pickup and drop off, working from home arrangements, or reduced hours such as a 9-day fortnight or rostered day off. This can promote work-life balance and encourage applications from individuals with young children or caring responsibilities (usually women), and those living with injuries, chronic health conditions or disability.
3. Include a diversity statement encouraging applicants from diverse backgrounds to apply. [LinkedIn](#)<sup>32</sup> has a range of example diversity statements and examples of inclusive job descriptions.
4. Consider advertising through alternate advertising streams, to reach people who might not be on LinkedIn or job websites such as Seek. For example: Women in STEM networks, [Ethical Jobs](#), [LGBTI Jobs](#), skilled migrant mentoring programs (for example, [City East Mentoring Program](#) in Sydney; [AMES Skilled Professional Migrants Program](#) in Melbourne, [Kaleidoscope](#) in Perth), professional groups for people with disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment networks, such as [Indigenous Employment](#), a job board, which connects Aboriginal job seekers with employers committed to Reconciliation.





## ● Accepting applications

**The application process you choose can put some applicants at a disadvantage.**

For example, complex or inaccessible application portals can be difficult to navigate for individuals with a disability. Consider how you might reduce barriers to accommodate applicants with a disability or applicants for whom English is a second language.

Some strategies you can use to remove or reduce potential barriers for applicants:

- Do not request unnecessary information or materials.
- Reduce complexity of the application process where possible, for example use single page job application portals or invite applicants to submit their application by email.
- Offer reasonable adjustments to the application process upon request.
- Invite candidates to get in touch with the job listing contact if they have any questions relating to the role. Think broadly about

transferable skills and the abilities of people to apply skills learned from other contexts.

- Finally, if you are using a job portal, ensure it is accessible for people with a disability. You can self-check the accessibility of your website or job portal using:
  - The [WebAIM colour contrast checker](#)<sup>33</sup> and [alternative text checker](#).<sup>34</sup>
  - Using the [AccessibilityOz Factsheets](#).<sup>35</sup>
  - Where possible, use Microsoft Word rather than PDF format for attached files to ensure accessibility for people who use screen reader technology.<sup>36</sup>

## ● Short-listing



**Employers or recruiters who are shortlisting applicants have an important role in eliminating bias and discrimination in recruitment.**

Employers should:

- Ensure a gender balance within shortlisted candidates. If you find that most applicants are men, for example, you might need to review the job description and consider the language and key selection criteria used to ensure they are not 'gendered'.
- Have a clear understanding of the requirements of the job, and short list applicants based solely on these requirements.
- Use the selection criteria to evaluate applicants, considering skills and experience in line with the job requirements.
- Consider 'special measures' recruitment rounds in which applicants from a particular minority group are favourably ranked.
- Consider the reasons behind career breaks.
- Document the decision-making process in shortlisting applicants to ensure transparency.

### Additional considerations when shortlisting applicants

#### Career breaks

People with a disability or chronic illness may have had breaks in their employment history due to impact of disability or health requirement, resulting in gaps in their resume. Employers should consider the transferable skills a candidate brings from personal experience or other work experience. Refugees may also have gaps in their employment history, and recruiters should consider the transferable skills candidates bring from both personal experience and work experience from other countries.

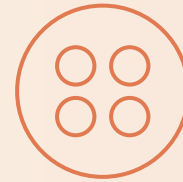
#### Level of English

Recruiters can also widen the pool of suitable candidates if they consider whether the level of English required to write an impressive application is the same as the level of English required to perform the role. If you need a higher level of English for the application than the job, then it might be worthwhile thinking of different ways to assess candidate suitability.

#### Psychometric testing

Some businesses use psychometric tests to assess potential employees during recruitment, but these standardised tests may not be compatible with everyone. Many neurodiverse people can struggle to complete psychometric tests effectively due to a combination of anxiety and executive function challenges. Some candidates also may not want to disclose neurodiverse attributes.





**Stereotypes in the workplace**

**It's important not to make assumptions about people based on stereotypes. These assumptions are often harmful, prevent equal access to employment opportunities, and can mean employers miss out on talented applicants.**

**Cultural diversity**

People from culturally diverse backgrounds, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are often disadvantaged when potential employers and recruiters make assumptions about cultural norms and behaviour, which affect perceptions of whether a candidate will 'fit in' with the culture of the organisation.

> **Myths and misperceptions about cultural diversity**<sup>37</sup>

**Disability**

People with a disability are disadvantaged by the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and attitudes about disability, resulting in the perception that they are sick or burdened, dependant on others, or that they cannot take on certain responsibilities. People with disabilities are capable of participating fully in community life just like people who do not have a disability.

> **Myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities**<sup>38</sup>

**Age**

Mature-aged employees often experience bias driven by the stereotype that they are slow to learn new skills, struggle with technology, or that they won't 'fit in' with a younger workforce. Younger employees may also experience stereotype bias that they are entitled or lazy.

> **Generational diversity in IBM's Myths, Exaggerations and Uncomfortable Truths Report**<sup>39</sup>





## Interviewing



**Employers should plan the interview process ahead of time to ensure all interviewers understand the process and have a clear understanding of the requirements of the job. Short-listed applicants should be afforded the opportunity to discuss their suitability for the role and to highlight their skills and experience.**

### Before the interview

Consider how you can remove barriers during the interview process. Before interviewing candidates, employers might consider:

- Create a list of defined questions to ask candidates and grade their answers on a pre-determined scale to avoid going with a 'gut feeling' or 'common interests' which may disadvantage some candidates.
- Conducting interviews in a location that is accessible to people with disabilities, for example choosing a location without stairs. Additionally, choose a location that is welcoming or less formal may make candidates feel more comfortable.
- Asking candidates if they have any accessibility requirements, such as wheelchair parking or building lift access.
- Accommodating any requests for a support person to attend the interview, this could be a translator, an Auslan interpreter or a Disability Employment Service case manager.
- Giving applicants the list of questions ahead of time, to support preparation.
- If possible, ensure all interviewers should have some form of diversity or bias mitigation training.

Remember that candidates are not required to disclose a disability during the application process unless the disability affects their ability to undertake the inherent requirements of the role.

### During the Interview

- Ensure that the interview panel is gender balanced.
- Consider that candidates may use different body language because of a disability or cultural background. For example, a candidate who does not offer to shake hands or make consistent eye contact may be interpreted as rude, but in some cultures this may indicate respect or courtesy.
- Ensure that interview questions do not require candidates to reveal unnecessary information such as their ethnicity, faith, or sexuality. Candidates are also not required to disclose information about their family or caring responsibilities.
- Consider preparing a set of interview questions that all candidates are asked: this ensures that all applicants' responses can be assessed equitably.
- Consider the language and questions posed to candidates, remembering that candidates are not required to disclose private or sensitive information during an interview. You can find some examples to asking non-discriminatory interview questions:

**> [A step-by-step guide to preventing discrimination in recruitment](#)<sup>40</sup>**

For example, you are interviewing a candidate for a role which requires the ability to travel interstate and occasionally work out of hours during busy periods. Instead of asking the candidate about their family and caring responsibilities, instead ask if they can meet these requirements of the role. This allows the candidate to respond without forcing them to discuss their family or childcare responsibilities which could lead to potential discriminatory questions or lead to a biased outcome.

... Interviewing

**Applicants with a disability**

When interviewing an applicant with a disability, employers must make reasonable adjustments to the interview process to ensure the applicant is not disadvantaged. This might include adjusting the interview location for accessibility, or conducting interviews online. Employers may need to ask an applicant about their disability or chronic illness to determine if they will be able to perform the job requirements, for example if essential requirements of a job included manual labour, or the use of equipment or technologies that rely on sight, hearing or mobility for use.

While it is acceptable to ask candidates specific information about their disability in order to assess health and safety risks to the candidate, and to confirm their ability to perform required duties, employers should avoid asking for any unnecessary information.

**> Interviewing people with a disability<sup>41</sup>**

**Applicants with English as a second language**

They may have varying levels of spoken and written English and may communicate using different body language and self-expression.

Asking overly technical questions can disadvantage applicants with limited English language skills who may not require that level of communication to meet the requirements of the role. Employers should consider the technical and transferable skills of all applicants and not decide the suitability of an applicant on their language skills alone.

Employers should consider how the interview process could be adapted to ensure that applicants are not disadvantaged.

Employers could:

- Encourage the use of interpreter services, or allow applicants to bring a support person to the interview.
- Review interview questions for potential bias.
- Avoid jargon or overly technical language.
- Be aware of body language and practice active listening, recognising that accents are not indicative of poor language skills.
- Allow short-listed candidates to demonstrate their abilities via a paid 'trial' shift.

**> Conducting culturally-sensitive interviews<sup>42</sup>**





## ● Making an offer

**The final stage of recruitment involves selecting the best candidate for the job.**

To ensure selection of the final candidate is fair, a selection panel should:

- Discuss how the candidate's skills match the selection criteria, and their suitability for the role.
- Consider all information from the application, the interview and gathered from referees to make the final decision.
- Document the decision-making process in selecting the candidate.

To support unsuccessful candidates to improve their chances in the future, employers should provide a clear explanation as to why they were not selected and offer feedback on their interview performance.

### **Affinity Bias**

**One of the most common ways that bias persists in the workplace is through the 'affinity bias'. Research suggests we are drawn to people who look, think and act like us. This is part of the reason that male dominated workforces can be challenging or even hostile environments for women and people from marginalised groups.**

**Toolkit users are encouraged to read more about [affinity bias](#).**

### **SUGGESTED READING**

**[A step-by-step guide to preventing discrimination in recruitment](#)**

Australian Human Rights Commission (2014)

**[Guidelines for Gender Neutral Recruitment](#)**

Government of South Australia Office for Women (2017)

**[Australian Employers Guide to Hiring Refugees](#)**

TENT Partnership for Refugees (2019)

**[A step-by-step guide to preventing discrimination in recruitment](#)**

Australian Human Rights Commission (2014)

## RETAIN

In Australia, small businesses are predominantly male-led, with male dominated workforces. A lack of gender diversity means that it is often difficult develop an equitable and inclusive culture, which is a known barrier to companies retaining women and other diverse talent.

Creating a culture of equity, diversity and inclusion is key to retaining a diverse workforce and supporting happy and productive employees.

There is strong evidence that developing an inclusive workplace culture has significant benefits to retaining employees<sup>45</sup>, which in turn improves productivity by reducing the cost and time required to train new staff. A safe and inclusive culture also helps employees feel valued at work, improving staff wellbeing and motivation to contribute.

This guide contains steps your business can take to develop an inclusive workplace required to retain the diverse workforce you are building. Toolkit users are encouraged to work through the guide and implement steps that are suitable for your business.

### Track your progress

Tick as you go

- 1. Creating a diversity policy
- 2. Workplace culture
- 3. Workplace accessibility
- 4. Flexible work
- 5. Leading by example
- 6. Discrimination and harassment
- 7. Measuring diversity





## 1 Creating a diversity policy

**Organisations that show a commitment to diversity and inclusion are more likely to retain a talented and innovative workforce.**

The first step to embedding diversity and inclusion in your business is to develop a diversity policy. Diversity Council Australia provides tips for writing a diversity policy<sup>46</sup>, and you can view existing best-practice diversity policies from STEM organisations such as [ANSTO](#)<sup>47</sup> or [ATSE](#)<sup>48</sup>, or [download basic free templates](#)<sup>49</sup> online.

Diversity and inclusion policies vary in content depending on the organisation, but can include:

- A clear and unambiguous statement of commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity.
- A summary of what diversity, equity and inclusion mean for your business. You can include your employees in the development of the policy to be inclusive, promote a shared understanding, and encourage ownership of these values.

- A brief outline of the diversity and inclusion objectives and goals your business wants to achieve. These goals ideally would be high-level initiatives your organisation is striving towards to foster a culture of inclusion and respect.

Outlining these goals provides a level of accountability for leadership.

Some example goals might include:

- To be an employer of choice for all people.
- To ensure fair and equal access to opportunities and resources, and to equitably reward and recognise work and contributions.
- To encourage and support employees to bring their whole selves to work.

- A brief action plan to accomplish these goals. This might include some content from the Toolkit Quick Reference Guides outlining recruitment or promotion strategies, workplace culture and accessibility policies, and a summary of who is responsible for implementing organisational strategies.





## 2 Workplace culture

**Creating a safe and inclusive workplace culture is key to retaining staff from all backgrounds and abilities. By providing an inclusive and supportive workplace, people are supported to bring their whole selves to work.**

Changing workplace culture requires real time and effort. When actions towards diversity and inclusion are left as voluntary activities on top of someone's substantive role, there is a possibility it may be ineffective and undervalued, which can be counterproductive. This is a challenge for under-resourced SMEs.

On a positive note, changing the workplace culture of small businesses can be more achievable than in larger businesses, as smaller teams are more dynamic and often have better communication between staff and leadership.

Changing culture requires commitment from everyone in the workplace. Here are a few key steps that you can take to encourage a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace culture:

- Begin to set the culture of your business by writing a value or mission statement that reflects the values of diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity you wish to embed in the business moving forward. Having a well-crafted mission statement helps your business makes decisions that are consistent with these values. With this in place, efforts towards diversity and inclusion are more likely to be successful.

- Include a diversity statement on your website describing your commitment to diversity and inclusion, which can attract more diverse clients, collaborators and employees who share your values. See this [Diversity and inclusion example](#) by Engineers Australia.
  - Review your own business practices to identify skills and knowledge gaps. Share resources that expand your understanding of the challenges and opportunities to improve diversity and inclusion.
  - Look for low-cost training or free online seminars to share with employees to encourage more active learning, such as diversity and cultural awareness training. These courses should be undertaken at work or during work hours, as they should be considered formal training or professional development.
- Some examples of organisations offering online training courses include:
- The [Centre for Cultural Competence Australia](#)<sup>51</sup>, a majority Indigenous-owned consulting and cultural training organisation
  - [Brotherhood of St Laurence](#)<sup>52</sup> who specialise in migrant and refugee cultural awareness training
  - [Pride in Diversity](#)<sup>53</sup>, a national not-for-profit employer support program for LGBTIQ+ workplace inclusion
  - The [Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman](#)<sup>54</sup> who provide targeted training for small business
- Encourage and celebrate diversity by embracing national events of significance, including [events that are significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#), such as NAIDOC week, National Sorry Day, and National Reconciliation Week, and other days of national significance.<sup>55</sup>
  - Engage in Blackcard Training for all employees within the Organisation. An Aboriginal National organisation that helps to embed Indigenous perspectives within your organisation and in the minds of your employees.
  - Support the wellbeing of your employees by providing access to mental health resources like the [Beyond Blue free online training modules](#)<sup>56</sup> and [downloadable resources](#)<sup>57</sup> on mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.
  - Update your business strategy to include diversity and inclusion. This might include changes to workforce development, client or customer relationships and work processes. Seek to implement this new strategy by communicating changes to staff and demonstrating your commitment to change.
  - Put up the [Fair Work Ombudsman's diversity and inclusion poster](#)<sup>58</sup> in the shared zone within the workplace to show the organisations commitment to diversity and inclusion.

**Optional further steps**

Ensure your products and marketing strategies are inclusive by design, and that they reflect the diversity of the community that you operate in. Your brand should reflect your commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Consider your supply chain from technology hardware, services, to catering and use the list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses from [Supply Nation](#).

When hosting events, consider the cultural diversity of the world around you and your staff and be thoughtful in catering for all people.

Review your supply chain and consider how you can support businesses who share your values. You can do this by asking your suppliers or service providers about their diversity and inclusion practices before making procurement choices.

Engage in social responsibility initiatives. This could include donating to local fundraisers or charities or sharing skills and knowledge within your community.

Consider creating a Reconciliation Action Plan. [Reconciliation Australia](#) has all the tools you need to do this.

**SUGGESTED READING****The Cultural Atlas**

SBS Australia

An educational resource that provides comprehensive information on the cultural background of Australia's migrant populations.<sup>60</sup>

**CELEBRATE DIVERSITY****Lunar New Year**

Late January-Early February each year

**NAIDOC week**

The week of the first Sunday of July

**National Sorry Day**

26th May

**National Reconciliation Week**

27 May-3 June

**Refugee Week**

14th-20th June

**International Day of People with a Disability**

3 December

**Ramadan**

Islamic

**Yom Kippur**

Jewish

**Deepavali (Diwali)**

Hindu, Sikh, Jain

> [Find more days of national importance on the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs website](#)



### 3 Workplace accessibility

**Making your workplace more accessible can help a range to people to feel supported and safe at work and can help build a stronger sense of belonging.**

This might include people with a disability, neurodiverse people, and people who speak English as a second language.

There are several strategies you can use to help your workplace is more accessible, including:

- Auditing the accessibility of your workplace to identify barriers to accessibility, and making changes to address these barriers, or moving to a more accessible premises.

You can engage an access auditor to audit your workplace and provide costings and advice on compliance. Find an auditor near you through the [Association of Consultants in Access Australia](#), or through the [Australian Network on Disability](#). Similarly, you are able to engage a consultant/ auditor to assist you with each of the diversity specialisations.

- Using plain English in staff communications and signage
- Using accessible information technology where appropriate (for example, using closed-captioning on videos, or voice-to-text software, and files suitable for screen reader technology)

Consider the layout of your workplace and discuss ways you might make your workplace more accessible to a wider range of people: those with a disability, or with additional environmental requirements.

This might include considering the flow of the office space to allow room for wheelchairs or mobility aids, installing ramps, or adding accessible signing such as signs with braille and button-operated entry and exit. It could also include changing lighting and reducing noise in the workspace.



#### DID YOU KNOW ...

**Australian employers have a legal obligation<sup>61</sup> to provide ‘reasonable adjustments’ to accommodate the needs of an employee.**

**Reasonable adjustments include modifications to facilities, work practices, equipment or training that would allow an employee to safely perform the essential requirements of their job.**

**The Employment Assistance Fund<sup>62</sup> provides financial assistance to eligible people with a disability or mental health condition and their employers to fund work related modifications, equipment, Auslan services and workplace support services. If reasonable adjustments**



## 4 Flexible work

With the development of online workspaces and collaborative tools, the way we work is changing.

Employers often no longer require employees to attend physical premises to complete all aspects of their job, meaning that working arrangements can be more flexible.

This can benefit people with family or caring responsibilities, people with neurodiversity, or people managing health conditions.

Organisations can offer flexibility in several ways like supporting:

- Flexible patterns of work, such as split shifts, job-sharing and reduced FTE hours.
- Flexible location of work, including work from home.
- Other types of flexibility like expanded paid or unpaid leave, such as carers leave, domestic violence leave, and mental health days.

Managers without training can find it difficult to navigate flexible working arrangements.

We recommend managers read through the [WGEA Manager flexibility toolkit](#)<sup>63</sup> before tackling this step.

For more information on flexible working arrangements, managers can take the *Fair Work Ombudsman's Workplace Flexibility Course*<sup>64</sup> or read their [Best Practice Guide for Flexible Working Arrangements](#).<sup>65</sup>



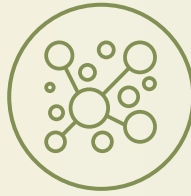
### CASE STUDY

#### Flexible work

Some roles require staff to work mostly on-site, such as in manufacturing, mining, or lab-based roles where an employee cannot work from home, or must work specific hours. In these roles, flexible work might look a little different than simply working remotely.

For example, BHP recently established a flexible work option for on-site employees by allowing them to adjust their rostered hours to best suit their needs, including job sharing and shorter shifts. They found this increased staff retention, and increased percentage of women in the organisation from 17 to 21 per cent over 12 months.<sup>66</sup>

While small businesses have different operational needs, this example shows that 'flexible work' isn't just working from home, but can be any format where aspects of a role can be varied to allow more flexibility and better quality of life for your employees. Start by working out the absolute requirements of roles within your organisation, to determine where flexibility could be possible.



**5 Leading by example**

**Leaders are responsible for setting workplace culture. Changing workplace culture is contingent on clear and consistent communication.**

To implement changes at work, open two-way communication channels should be established early and supported by all levels of leadership.

People in leadership positions should:

- Lead by example, modelling behaviour consistent with your goals towards an inclusive and discrimination free workplace.

Read the management model, **The Leadership Shadow**, produced by the *Champions of Change Coalition and Chief Executive Women*<sup>67</sup>, which aims to help leaders listen, learn and lead by understanding the impact of their personal actions.

- Ensure all managers are implementing strategies and policies in an agreed, consistent way. This can be supported by integrating relevant KPI's into performance agreements to give managers accountability.
- Communicate changes within the business to all employees. This should include an explanation of the benefits of diversity and inclusion and expectations of all staff to participate in modelling inclusive behaviour.
- Ask for support, suggestions, and feedback from employees during all stages of change. This could include anonymous feedback, all-staff discussions, or team-based discussions which feedback through team leaders or managers.
- Undertake diversity and inclusion training or self-assessment in order to identify opportunities for growth, such as:
  - The *Fair Work Ombudsman's Diversity and Discrimination Course*<sup>68</sup>. This short course is designed for small businesses and provides participants with a short self-assessment tool and a personalised action plan to address areas of diversity and inclusion that need improvement.
  - The *Australian Human Rights Commission's Workplace Cultural Diversity Tool*<sup>69</sup>. This is designed for internal use by organisations to measure their progress towards good practice in cultural diversity.

**KEY MESSAGES**

**For communicating diversity and inclusion to your employees**

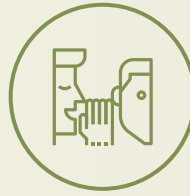
**Achieving diversity and inclusion is a win-win for both employees and the business.**

**Everyone should have the same opportunity to participate and thrive at work, regardless of our differences.**

**Diversity brings strength to our business and our capacity to creatively solve problems and meet challenges.**

**Ideas on how the business can become more inclusive will be welcomed and considered.**

**Everyone has a role to play in creating and maintaining an inclusive workplace culture.**



## 6 Discrimination and harassment

**Evidence suggests that workplace discrimination and harassment affects women more than men, and that this is compounded by other factors such as age, disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.**

Organisations looking to retain a diverse workforce and foster a safe, inclusive, and respectful workplace must address and prevent workplace discrimination and harassment.

Businesses that take action to address the systemic drivers of discrimination and harassment have the power to provide safe and inclusive workplaces.

**Key steps to prevent discrimination and harassment are to:**

- 1) develop and implement industry standard discrimination and harassment policies, and**
- 2) establish a safe and secure complaints process.**

With these in place, you provide employees the right to a safe and respectful workplace which is fundamental to supporting a diverse workforce and retaining talent.

### **Developing discrimination and harassment policies**

Developing and implementing discrimination and harassment policies is an essential step to prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace. SMEs can adapt their own Discrimination and Harassment policy by using free online templates, such as:

- The **[Discrimination and Harassment Policy Template](#)**<sup>71</sup> by the *Australian Human Rights Commission*.
- The sample policies available in the **[2019 Employers' Toolkit](#)**<sup>72</sup> by the *Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland*.
- SMEs can also adapt their own sexual harassment policy from sample policy from the *Champions of Change Coalition* report **[Disrupting the System - Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#)** (p85)<sup>73</sup>.

At a minimum, discrimination and harassment policies should include:

- A clear and unambiguous statement outlining the organisation's zero-tolerance approach to preventing discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Definitions of discrimination and harassment.
- A summary of the legal obligations of employers and individuals.
- A summary of the responsibilities of all employees and leadership within the organisation.
- A clear process for reporting discrimination and harassment complaints.

### **Addressing discrimination**

Although implementing discrimination and harassment policies is a critical step towards providing a safe and respectful workplace, policies alone are insufficient to prevent this behaviour from occurring.

Organisations must actively engage to eliminate discriminatory behaviour and harassment for these policies to be effective.

Further steps you can take in your workplace include:

- Identifying possible risk factors for discrimination and harassment, for example, where you have a staff member returning from parental leave or injury, or when making changes at work to accommodate new employees, who may have specific accessibility needs.
- Identifying areas where discrimination has occurred. SMEs can do this by conducting exit interviews with departing employees, conducting anonymous staff surveys, or by reviewing teams with high rates of staff turnover. Employers can use the **[free exit interview template](#)**<sup>74</sup> from *Business Victoria*.
- Providing discrimination and harassment training to staff to ensure they understand their rights and responsibilities in the workplace. There are low-cost training opportunities in most states and territories.



### Establish complaints and response processes

Employers must establish a process for receiving and responding to discrimination or harassment complaints. For employees to feel comfortable raising issues of discrimination or bias in the workplace, processes must be in place that allow individuals to raise issues of discrimination and bias, and ensure these issues are heard and acted upon. Consider taking the following steps:

- **Establish a complaints process for employees to report discrimination.** This process must be confidential, independent, and accessible to all employees. It must give at least two options for people to whom employees can report a complaint. The process should ensure that no victimisation can occur after a complaint has been made, and that the process has a defined timeline and is well-documented. Read the *Australian Human Rights Commission's [Good Practice Guidelines to Internal Complaints Processes](#)*.<sup>75</sup>
- **Nominate at least two staff members as Contact Officers for employees to discuss matters relating to discrimination and harassment.** Ideally this should be someone other than the most senior leader of the business, to ensure staff are comfortable raising these matters.
- **Provide access to information on support services for individuals to contact.** A list of organisations and resources that can provide assistance can be found on [humanrights.gov.au](https://www.humanrights.gov.au).<sup>76</sup> In cases where an individual's needs cannot be met within the workplace, engage with specialist external support services (CALD, LGBTIQ+ and disability services) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **Consider engaging an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).** EAPs provide confidential support to employees and in some cases are specifically targeted for small and medium business. Most provide access to counselling and support for employees, and many offer more services including organisational assessment, management consultation and crisis support.

### SUGGESTED READING

#### **Disrupting the System: Preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace**<sup>69</sup>

Champions of Change Coalition  
A report that aims to guide more effective organisational approaches to preventing sexual harassment in the workplace.

#### **Ending Workplace Sexual Harassment: A Resource for Small, Medium and Large Employers**

Australian Human Rights Commission  
A resource that aims to assist employers to understand and meet their legal obligations under the Sex Discrimination Act. The report also provides practical guidance on how employers can prevent and effectively respond to sexual harassment in the workplace.

#### **The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key indicators Framework**

## Disability confident managers

Disability discrimination complaints are one of the most common complaints received by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Despite being positive about welcoming people with a disability into the workforce, employers often don't know where to start to provide an inclusive workplace and prevent disability-related discrimination.

Australian Network on Disability provides [low-cost training options](#)<sup>77</sup> for employers or individuals looking to create disability confident workplaces.

## WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Research on workplace sexual harassment clearly and consistently indicates that:

1. Sexual harassment is a systemic issue that is predominantly perpetrated by men against women, as well as by men against gender-diverse people and other men.
2. There is growing evidence that workplace sexual harassment disproportionately affects some groups, and that age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, and job security are factors that increase the likelihood of experiencing workplace sexual harassment.
3. Sexual harassment is significantly under-reported for many reasons including fear of negative impacts on professional reputation, job security and career progression.
4. Sexual harassment has a significant impact on staff wellbeing, which reduces productivity and leads to high staff turnover.

Employees can report experiences or knowledge of sexual harassment incidents to:

1. A nominated Contact Officer in your organisation
2. Your business' Employee Assistance Program (where applicable)
3. The **Equal Opportunity Commission** in your state or territory<sup>78</sup>
4. The **Australian Human Rights Commission**<sup>79</sup> on 1300 656 419
5. The *National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service* on 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732). This service provides comprehensive support and guidance for individuals who have experienced harassment, or for people supporting someone who has.

## Employers have a legal obligation to prevent sexual harassment at work.

For more information, we recommend the following resources:

### **Disrupting the System: Preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace**

A report that aims to guide more effective organisational approaches to preventing sexual harassment in the workplace. *Champions of Change Coalition*<sup>80</sup>

### **Ending Workplace Sexual Harassment: A Resource for Small, Medium and Large Employers**

A resource that aims to assist employers to understand and meet their legal obligations under the Sex Discrimination Act. The report also provides practical guidance on how employers can prevent and effectively respond to sexual harassment in the workplace. *Australian Human Rights Commission*<sup>81</sup>

### **Fair Work Ombudsman: Harassment in the workplace**

A resource outlining an employers responsibility under the Fair Work act to stop sexual harassment in the workplace.

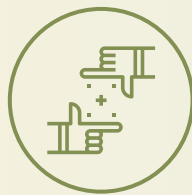
## 7 Measuring diversity

**Measuring diversity can help to identify gaps and implement strategies or targets based on your organisation's specific diversity makeup.**

Although collecting information about diversity is not always required (for example, some organisations can recognise a lack of diversity and inclusion without collecting data), it can help you to establish a baseline that can be used to track changes over time and evaluate the impact of your initiatives.

Small businesses looking to collect diversity data should:

- Work out what information you need to collect and how you will collect it (survey, form, questionnaire) and when (for example, you might consider including some questions in recruitment paperwork).
- Explain why you are collecting the information and how it will be used. This could link back to your aspirations about improving diversity and inclusion within the business.
- Use the data to put in place actions to improve diversity and inclusion (such as steps from the Toolkit) and measure their impact over time.
- Share the outcomes of such initiatives with employees and celebrate wins together.



What should you ask? Every organisation will approach this differently. You could consider:

- Asking people how they identify in terms of ethnicity, culture, or faith.
- Allowing people to identify other languages spoken at home.
- Leaving space for people to list pronouns, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Small businesses can also measure the makeup of their workforce using existing tools such as:

- **Diversity Atlas**<sup>82</sup> which is a fee-based service where employees complete a survey, and the organisation gets a dashboard of their diversity, and options for tailored consultation to address diversity gaps.
- Diversity Council Australia offers tips for **counting cultural diversity**<sup>83</sup>, or alternatively you can find **free diversity and inclusion survey templates**<sup>84</sup> from SurveyMonkey.





Some people may not wish to share information about their identity, particularly those who have experienced discrimination in the past.

It is essential that this information is sought on a voluntary basis only, and that employees have the right to share this information anonymously and for it to be treated as confidential.

#### **SUGGESTED READING**

**Ten steps you can take to create a fair and productive workplace**  
Australian Human Rights Commission (2015)  
[humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/ten-steps-you-can-take-create-fair-and-productive-workplace](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/employers/ten-steps-you-can-take-create-fair-and-productive-workplace)

**Employers' toolkit: Resources for building an inclusive workplace**  
Queensland Human Rights Commission (2019)  
[qhrc.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/20578/QHRC\\_EmployersToolkit.pdf](https://www.qhrc.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/20578/QHRC_EmployersToolkit.pdf)

**Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace**  
Champions of Change Coalition (2020)  
[malechampionsofchange.com/preventing-and-responding-to-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/](https://malechampionsofchange.com/preventing-and-responding-to-sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/)

**Gari Yala (Speak the Truth):**  
Centreing the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians at work

**Neurodiversity Hub: Resources for employers**

**Workplace Mental Health Toolkit**

## REACH

In an inclusive workplace, all employees should have equal access to opportunities and resources. Unfortunately, discrimination based on a person's age, gender, ethnicity, culture, disability, or sexual orientation can lead to some people having less access to opportunities for professional development and promotion.

Additionally, a lack of support for career breaks and flexible work associated with parental leave, sick leave, or caring responsibilities disproportionately affects career progression of women, and people with a disability or chronic health condition.

Proactively ensuring that promotions and professional development are offered fairly and equitably to your workforce can benefit your business. Studies show that increasing the proportion of women in management positions by 10 per cent or more leads to a 6.6 per cent average increase in

the market value of Australian ASX listed companies.<sup>65</sup> Being an equal opportunity employer by supporting all employees to access professional development and promotional opportunities will also help to attract and retain talent.

Due to size and growth capacity, small businesses may have limited scope to offer promotion and career progression. However, offering best-practice professional development opportunities to all employees, and promotion opportunities where possible, can help small businesses remain competitive with bigger organisations for STEM talent.

### Track your progress

Tick as you go

- 1. Supporting parents and carers
- 2. Mentoring and professional development
- 3. Champions and role models
- 4. Pathways to promotion
- 5. Pay equity
- 6. Eliminating bias







## 1 Supporting parents and carers

All employees in Australia are entitled to parental leave, and some businesses offer additional paid leave for parents and carers.

While this is not possible for some small businesses to accommodate, having a clear and gender-equal parental leave policy is a good way to show your business values its employees. A policy can help your managers and employees understand how parental leave works and can help attract and keep staff. Find out more about best practice parental leave policies through the *Fair Work Ombudsman's Parental Leave best practice guide*.<sup>86</sup>

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics* consistently reports that women undertake a greater share of caring and domestic work, resulting in more time spent out of the workforce and less opportunity for professional development and career progression. This issue is often amplified by factors such as ethnicity, disability, and neurodiversity, making it harder for some women to return to work following a break.

A lack of workplace flexibility to accommodate caring responsibilities can result in fewer women in senior and leadership roles and should be considered by businesses in developing flexibility policies.

Flexible working and a healthy work-life balance can help people with caring responsibilities to return to work after a break and maintain their career progression. Businesses can support parents and carers by:

- Offering flexible working arrangements to all employees, including work from home options, and flexible hours of work. Suggestions for offering flexible work are detailed in step 4 of the RETAIN Quick Reference Guide.
- Ensuring employees on flexible working arrangements have access to the same benefits, training, and promotional opportunities as full-time employees.
- Encouraging men, as well as women, to take parental leave when a new child enters the family.

- Both men and women in leadership roles proactively role modelling the normalisation of caring and parenting duties, and/or a flexible approach to place and hours of work

For more information on supporting parents and carers in the workplace, visit the [Supporting Working Parents website](#).<sup>87</sup>

## 2 Mentoring and professional development

**Mentoring, coaching, and networking activities can lead to professional development and provide pathways for promotion and career progression.**

These activities can also help to offset the impact of career breaks.

Small businesses can support people in their organisation to participate in mentoring or networking opportunities by taking one or more of the following steps:

- Provide a professional development plan for all employees, which may include a professional development fund.
- Encourage women in your business to participate in leadership programs. Two high-profile examples include the *Veski STEM sidebyside program*<sup>88</sup>, or *Science and Technology Australia's Superstars of STEM*<sup>89</sup>, or consider more targeted programs in your field or region.
- Encourage informal mentoring between employees with different levels of experience. Informal mentoring can encourage productive relationships, support employee's skills and knowledge development, and encourage mentorship and coaching skills in mentors.

- Invest in external mentoring opportunities. You can support your employees to receive mentoring or coaching externally through several service providers, or keep an eye out for professional development, mentoring, and networking opportunities through the following organisations:

*Professionals Australia's Professional Women*

*Women in Leadership Australia*

*Franklin Women Mentoring Program*

*Kaleidoscope Mentoring Program* (migrants and refugees)

*Out for Australia* LGBTIQ+ Mentoring



For more information on the benefits of mentoring, read WGEA's *Supporting careers: mentorship or sponsorship? perspective paper*.<sup>90</sup>





### 3 Champions and role models

#### Representation matters.

It is important to champion and showcase both internal and external role models for individuals who are underrepresented to foster a culture of inclusion at all levels.

Promotion of role models can help to demonstrate the opportunities for people who are considering career progression.

Steps that businesses can take are to:

- Identify and celebrate internal or external role models from different backgrounds, showing your employees that leaders in your organisation, or in the industry, do not have to fit a stereotype.
- Promote leaders who are active and visible diversity and inclusion advocates.
- Ensure that managers are accountable for modelling inclusive behaviour.
- Where possible, promote and discuss the diversity within your business and industry.



#### Representation and Role Models

Representation is a vitally important to attracting diverse talent. Highlighting career paths of internal or external role models helps to demonstrate your business's commitment to the inclusion may encourage more recruitment and promotion of people from diverse backgrounds.

In science, technology and engineering, there is less visibility of role models for people from diverse backgrounds, women, LGBTIQ+ people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This can have a big impact on whether someone feels included and represented, or that they belong. Representation can encourage people to apply for jobs, promotions and careers they might otherwise feel excluded from.

See some resources below for finding excellent examples of role models. Check out:

- [Deloitte's Outstanding 50 LGBTIQ+ Leaders](#), with profiles of 50 inspiring LGBTIQ+ leaders in Australia.
- [Indigenous Engineers Australia](#) who are raising awareness and activity of Indigenous Engineers within industry.

Action to promote role models must be supported by other mechanism of inclusion— particularly cultural safety. Businesses looking to attract and retain a diverse workforce must take strong, visible action to prevent discrimination and harassment by implementing discrimination and harassment policies outlined in the [RETAIN Quick Reference Guide](#).



#### 4 Pathways to promotion

Many business leaders look to promote people who are like those who have successfully held the position in the past.

This leads to the same type of person being favoured and leaves no room for diversity of thought and lived experience.

Promotional practices which favour commonality and systematically discriminate against women, people with a disability, and people from different cultures or backgrounds must be eliminated.

To avoid this, businesses should:

- Have clear and defined pathways for promotion and professional development that are available and communicated to all employees. This may be a career map or similar which supports employee progression.
- Review existing performance evaluation practices for bias or discrimination (see '[Eliminating Bias](#)' further in this guide).
- Be transparent about opportunities for promotion and professional development. Advertise or communicate these opportunities to all staff.

#### 5 Pay equity

Within your organisation, there may be people doing similar jobs, with similar accountabilities and performance expectations, but receiving different pay.

Achieving pay equity is crucial to retaining talent and can deliver significant economic benefits to your business. There are several free tools and guides available to help small businesses achieve pay equity.

- The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) has developed a [three step guide for small businesses to address pay inequity](#).<sup>91</sup> We recommend that SMEs use this tool as a best-practice approach to understand, identify and take action on pay inequity.
- If your organisation does not have enough employees to conduct an equal pay analysis, you can measure like-for-like against a market benchmark. This ensures that all employees will be paid comparably against market rates for their role.
- The Fair Work Ombudsman provides a [best-practice guide for addressing pay equity](#)<sup>96</sup>, which summarises Australian employer obligations and a checklist for pay equity best-practice.
- Use the WGEA [Guide to Gender Pay Equity](#)<sup>92</sup> to better understand and address pay equity, as well as a [Gender Pay Gap Calculator](#).<sup>93</sup>
- Lastly, research shows that more women on boards can improve gender pay equity within an organisation, and lead to more women in senior leadership positions.<sup>97</sup> SMEs should consider gender equity on their boards as a key step towards ensuring pay equity.

## 6 Eliminating bias

**Unconscious bias is caused by beliefs, thoughts, or feelings we are not directly aware of, that influence our conscious judgement.**

Bias about gender roles in society can therefore influence decisions around remuneration and hiring, which contributes to pay inequity within businesses.

Hiring and promotion decisions are two areas in which bias commonly occurs in the workplace, and can prevent the right person being promoted into leadership positions. Research shows that men are more likely to successfully negotiate salary and promotions, while women are more likely to be penalised when they negotiate salary and promotions.<sup>98</sup>

Bias stemming from harmful stereotypes around ethnicity, faith, disability, age, or sexual orientation can also have significant negative impacts on career progression and promotion.



Businesses can take a several key steps to preventing bias in promotional decision-making processes:

- During performance reviews, use agreed-upon criteria that are consistently applied across all employees rather than requiring candidates to provide open ended responses. This provides a fairer opportunity for people for whom English is a second language, who might otherwise be disadvantaged despite being eligible for a promotion.
- Promotion decisions should involve input from more than one person, such as another senior member of the organisation, wherever possible. Ideally the promotion panel should include people of different genders or from diverse groups themselves.
- If possible, provide access to diversity and inclusion training for leadership. It is important to note that such training is usually only effective if structural changes to policies and operations are also undertaken, such as steps to reduce bias in hiring, and standardisation of performance reviews.

For more information, read AI Group's resource on **performance review bias**<sup>99</sup> and consider the types of bias that might be occurring in your business.

### SUGGESTED READING

#### **Gender equitable recruitment and promotion**

Workplace Gender Equity Agency (2019)  
[wgea.gov.au/publications/gender-equitable-recruitment-and-promotion](http://wgea.gov.au/publications/gender-equitable-recruitment-and-promotion)

#### **Best Practice Guides**

Fair Work Australia (n.d.)  
[fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates-and-guides/best-practice-guides](http://fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates-and-guides/best-practice-guides)

#### **Diversity in Engineering Toolkit**

Royal Academy of Engineering UK (n.d.)  
<https://raeng.org.uk/diversity>



# Glossary of key terms

## **Bias**

A potential cause of unfair or prejudicial treatment of someone due to personal opinion. It can be unconscious, innate or learned.

## **Covert racism**

Racial discrimination that is concealed or subtle rather than obvious or public

## **Cultural and linguistic diversity**

Refers to communities or individuals with diverse languages, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, traditions, societal structures and religions.

## **Disability**

Is defined by the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* which refers to people who have temporary and permanent disabilities; physical, intellectual, sensory, neurological, learning and psychosocial disabilities, diseases or illnesses, physical disfigurement, medical conditions, and work-related injuries. This extends to disabilities that people have had in the past and potential future disabilities, as well as disabilities that people are assumed to have.

## **Discrimination**

The unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, age or sexual orientation.

## **Diversity**

The differences between people and how a person identifies in relation to key dimensions including, but not limited to, gender, ethnicity, culture, faith, sexual orientation, age, and disability.

## **Gender diversity**

Gender identities that include men, women, and people who fall outside the binary of male and female, including transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary people.

## **Inclusion**

The concept of creating an environment in which all individuals feel a sense of belonging, are treated fairly and respectfully, and have equal access to opportunities and resources.

## **Neurodiversity**

This term describes people with different neurological and cognitive abilities and can include people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia or Tourette Syndrome. People who are neurodivergent can have a range of traits and characteristics, which can affect how people process information.

## **Structural Racism/Institutional racism**

Encompasses the policies, practices and procedures that inform and direct the everyday operation of organisations, businesses and enterprises and result in disadvantage based on race.



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## Design and production

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