# Prevention of Gender and Disability Based Violence Audit Toolkit

****Audit 2. Workplace culture

# Workplace culture

This audit tool supports your organisation to demonstrate inclusion of women and non-binary people with disabilities as employees, including regular staff, volunteers, and contractors. These questions relate to your organisation’s culture, diversity, opportunities, and conditions. Using a gender and disability lens, you will consider fairness, equity, and safety, across all aspects of your workplace, including leadership, policy, and practice.

Undertaking this audit can help prevent discriminatory behaviours, challenge harmful gender and disability based stereotypes, and promote diversity of talent across your staff to incorporate throughout leadership positions - all of which contribute to the prevention of violence against women and non-binary people with disabilities.

## Reflection

**How representative are your organisation’s leadership, staff, and volunteers of the proportion of the population with disabilities?**

Example: Colleagues feel comfortable to talk about their disability unprompted, members of staff share information about accessible adjustments and build knowledge about gender and disability inclusion as shared strengths.

## Culture and diversity

These questions relate to how your organisation creates a safe, respectful workplace for women and non-binary people with disabilities by listening to, valuing their diverse lived experiences, and taking active steps to diversify your workforce.

**1. How is diversity celebrated in your organisation?**

Promote and celebrate intersectionality and the diversity of all people, including different kinds of disabilities, gender, sexuality, age, faith, race and ethnicity. Commemorate days such as International Day of Persons with Disabilities; International Women’s Day; International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women; International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; NAIDOC Week; Ochre Ribbon Day; and LGBTQIA+ Pride Month.

Collaborate with disability led organisations to support their initiatives and events. Share stories of lived experience and showcase the achievements and contributions of diverse people with disabilities. Celebrating, promoting, and representing diversity in an authentic manner means that people are less likely to make stereotypes, opening more opportunities.

For a calendar of significant diversity and inclusion days, visit: <https://www.dca.org.au/resources/di-planning/di-days-dates>.

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**2. What affirmative action policies exist for women and non-binary people with disabilities in your organisation?**

Ensure everyone involved in recruitment understands the value and benefits of a diverse workforce and challenge any unconscious biases they may hold, such as the belief that someone’s gender or disability makes them less suitable for a role. Adopting affirmative action policies and quotas can help increase the representation of women and non-binary people with disabilities across all levels of seniority.

Affirmative action promotes greater equality of people who face entrenched discrimination or barriers due to gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. Policies promoting affirmative action in your organisation acknowledge and challenge intersectional discrimination and promote and normalise equality.

Australian legislation allows for the implementation of affirmative action measures. For more information, visit: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12099>.

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**3. Are women and non-binary people with disabilities represented within your organisation across all levels and program areas?**

Organisations which are disability and gender inclusive recruit, promote and retain women and non-binary people with a range of disabilities across the spectrum of paid and unpaid positions, including board members and executives. Some people with disabilities may not disclose, or experience barriers to acquiring positions of seniority in line with their qualifications due to the impact of discrimination.

Assess your current workforce composition to identify areas for improvement. This includes making sure the division of formal and informal labour is equitable. Consider who cleans the office kitchen, takes minutes during meetings, or undertakes additional unpaid work such as organising staff social events.

The creation of safe, affirming environments in which people can choose to disclose disability, and exercise leadership according to their attributes and strengths, challenges prevailing norms and expectations consigning them to lower-skilled or supporting paid and unpaid roles.

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**4. How are employees selected for training and promotion?**

Existing employees with disabilities will maintain a high level of engagement with organisations who actively demonstrate their commitment to providing training, promotion, and other career development opportunities on an equal and transparent basis. Such inclusive practice poses minimal financial outlay and only requires attitudinal shifts and documented commitment to inclusive and transparent decision-making.

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**5. How do managers and supervisors ask employees about their experiences of disability? How do they support employees who disclose disability?**

Managers and supervisors need to be confident to create respectful, supportive, open working environments for people with disabilities. This includes maintaining up-to-date knowledge of your organisational policies, procedures, and resources relevant to supporting team members who disclose disability. It can also mean enabling a workplace culture where staff can support one another’s strengths, including those relating to disability. While many people with disabilities do not require specific management, workplace adjustments or help, some do, or might over time. So, it is helpful that leadership demonstrate knowledge and flexibility to model what is on offer for all staff.

Job Access is funded by the Australian Government to provide advice and support, including an employer engagement team, information on workplace modifications, and training: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/employer-toolkit/managing-your-team/>.

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**6. How do managers and supervisors ask employees about their experiences of safety from disability and gender related violence and abuse? How do they respond to and refer employees who disclose experiences of violence?**

It is important to equip managers and supervisors to create safe, supportive, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed spaces for staff. Having policies and procedures in place to confidentially respond to and support employees who disclose violence, where necessary, is good practice, demonstrates wider inclusion and supports sustainability of your workforce.

State in your policies and procedures that violence against women and non-binary people with disabilities is a human rights violation, that gender and disability inequality drives discrimination, and how to hold perpetrators accountable. Clearly outline how staff can access support if directly or indirectly affected by violence, and what changes to working arrangements they can access to keep safe. This may include paid violence leave, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and/or resourced staff to offer initial support, accessible external referral and follow up. In some cases, you might require campaigning for change to the enterprise agreement.

For guidance and resources on supporting staff who have experienced or are experiencing violence, visit: <https://www.vic.gov.au/supporting-staff-family-violence-leave-policy-considerations>.

For more information on trauma-informed practice, visit: <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/framework-trauma-informed-practice>. For further resources, including training opportunities, visit: <https://professionals.blueknot.org.au/>.

For guidance on preventing and managing work-related gendered violence, visit: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/workwell-toolkit-prevent-and-manage-work-related-gendered-violence>.

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**7. How does your organisation reduce risk of fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma for employees?**

For a workplace to foster an inclusive culture, it is essential to encourage reflective practice, supporting staff to deliver work at a reasonable pace, without enduring burnout, fatigue, or isolation. Keep in mind that any of these experiences can have compounding impacts on the unique experiences of employees with disabilities.

Promoting regular breaks during the facilitation of activities and events supports staff delivering large amounts of content, and the uptake of content that is sensitive in nature. Create space for reflection and debriefing with supervisors or managers after events and activities, to manage physical, psychological, and emotional efforts required. This can also minimise risk of fatigue from constant screen time during events and activities that require digital access. Taking a trauma-informed approach means to also be proactive in identifying and minimising adverse effects on staff working in the context of violence, structural oppression and social injustice. This can include compassion fatigue, distress, hopelessness, re-traumatisation, and vicarious trauma.

For more information and resources for safety, security, health and wellbeing of employees, visit: <https://safeandequal.org.au/working-in-family-violence/wellbeing-self-care-sustainability/employer-responsibilities/>.

You can also download the Victorian Government’s guidelines for supervision in the family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing sectors here (PDF): <https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/Best-practice-supervision-guidelines-Family-violence%2C-sexual-assault-and-child-wellbeing.pdf>.

We cover prioritising safety within physical spaces further in the *Premises and catering* audit booklet.

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**8. How does your organisation support the inclusion of remote and hybrid working colleagues in workplace culture?**

Create spaces for non-work chats to encourage employees to get to know one another on a personal level, replicating face-to-face organic relationship building. Set up communication channels, schedule hybrid working with other colleagues, and ensure invitations to workplace events and celebrations include remote and hybrid workers. When feasible for online meetings, allow staff to switch off their cameras if needed.

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**9. How does your organisation promote and ensure that remote and hybrid working colleagues maintain healthy work-life balance?**

Offer flexible working schedules; focus on productivity rather than hours; have frequent check-ins to ensure that employees have achievable workloads; encourage breaks as required; create break rooms or quiet spaces; and respect working hours and do not expect that staff deliver work outside of those hours.

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**10. How does your organisation support employees who are living and/or working regionally during climate emergency events?**

Disasters and extreme weather events, such as bushfires and floods, have profound impacts on regional and remote communities. Gender, disability, and other intersecting identities also influence how people experience these events. Women and non-binary people with disabilities can face exacerbated barriers to accessing services and be at higher risk of experiencing gender and disability related violence. Offer an EAP and referral to culturally appropriate, trauma-informed support services where necessary. Flexible working arrangements, reallocation, and prioritisation of workloads, and increased paid time off can also support the impacts on employees or if they are unable to work for extended periods.

For more information on relief and recovery support services, visit: <https://www.vic.gov.au/recovery-support>.

For more information on disaster resilience, visit: <https://www.aidr.org.au/>.

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## Role design, recruitment, and reasonable adjustments

These questions relate to how accessible and inclusive your role design, recruitment and reasonable adjustment processes are for women and non-binary people with disabilities. Taking this approach, your organisation will recognise that there is a diverse range of requirements or preferences to support people to effectively engage in your work opportunities, display their suitability and strengths, and contribute to your vision and mission.

**1. What type of paid and unpaid work opportunities does your organisation offer?**

Offering a range of opportunities can promote the value of diverse skills and attributes and challenge traditional expectations of career paths. Work experience placements, internships and volunteering can offer people with disabilities alternative means of contributing to your organisation and increase your organisation’s exposure to employees with diverse skills and life experiences. However, it is important to note that offering unpaid opportunities is a contentious issue. For some people with disabilities, volunteering is a choice they can make and enjoy participating in this manner. Ensure such opportunities are valuable and given support so that roles are mutually beneficial, and that tokenism does not occur. Further, it is exploitative and unlawful for unpaid employees to do work that paid employees otherwise perform.

For more information on unpaid work, visit: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/fact-sheets/unpaid-work/unpaid-work-unpaid-work>.

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**2. How are position descriptions written?**

Your organisation can enhance position descriptions and advertising by clearly stating your commitment to gender and disability inclusion and encouraging a diverse range of applicants, including women and non-binary people with disabilities. Use gender neutral language and focus on a role’s inherent requirements through strengths-based language, rather than how requirements are to be met, e.g., using statements such as “ability to undertake work-related travel” rather than “possession of a Victorian driver’s licence”. This approach demonstrates openness to a wide range of methods for undertaking tasks, affording genuine equality of opportunity.

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**3. What flexibility does your organisation offer in role design and working arrangements?**

Offering flexible role design and working arrangements acknowledges the value of a diverse range of candidates while recognising the barriers posed by traditional expectations, e.g., working hours. Practices such as job carving and sharing can increase availability of employment for candidates who usually experience gender, disability, and other forms of discrimination. Reflect flexible work arrangements across all your day-to-day operations, such as scheduling meetings and events at times and locations that do not exclude staff with caring responsibilities or access requirements. Such arrangements can help employees better balance their work/life commitments and increase productivity and efficiency, and support their autonomy, independence, and equal participation.

For guidance on job carving for people with disabilities, visit: <https://includeability.gov.au/resources-employers/customising-job-person-disability>.

For guidance on implementing flexible working arrangements, visit: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/tools/manager-flex-toolkit>.

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**4. In what formats are position descriptions made available in job advertisements?**

Recruitment processes should ensure equitable opportunities for everyone, removing the possibility of further disadvantage, exclusion, or discouragement from participation for anyone. It is easy to prepare and promote role descriptions in accessible formats, such as Microsoft Word, for use with different forms of assistive technology. This immediately increases the accessibility of these documents to a wider pool of candidates with disabilities and ensures that women can exercise autonomy in choosing roles in which they are interested. It also indicates considerations of accessibility and that your organisation expects applications from candidates with disabilities.

We cover inclusive, accessible communication further in the *Information and communications* audit booklet.

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**5. What methods does your organisation use to assess candidate suitability?**

Flexibility in candidate assessment methods is easy to implement and can offer people with diverse disabilities more accessible ways of demonstrating their suitability. Flexible assessment processes counter the expectation of confidence within a traditional interview environment. Some examples of flexibility include interviewing over the phone, as opposed to in-person; providing a copy of interview questions ahead of time; and offering a practical assessment in place of an interview. Where possible, ensure members of interview panels reflect staff diversity when using this method to assess candidates.

For further guidance, visit: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/interviewing-people-with-disability>.

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**6. How is the availability of flexible assessment methods promoted in job advertisements?**

When advertising roles, clearly state your organisation’s commitment to meeting candidate access requirements, including flexible assessment processes. The active promotion of such flexibility creates an organisational environment fostering positive personal identities and affirming the equality of all candidates.

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**7. How can applicants contact your organisation to request flexible assessment methods?**

Applicants with disabilities may wish to optimise their independence and agency by discussing access needs or require assistance during the assessment process. It is good practice to include a direct method for contacting recruitment staff, such as a telephone number. A link to a social media site or email address on its own is not an adequate means of direct contact.

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**8. How is the availability of reasonable work adjustments promoted in job advertisements and during candidate assessment?**

Stating your commitment to reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities further contributes to a workplace environment that fosters positive personal identities and affirms the equality of all.

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**9. What forms of candidate experience are assessed?**

Applicants may have valuable transferrable skills from life experience beyond previous paid employment. Considering this experience gives equal assessment for people with disabilities, despite any gaps in employment history. This potentially opens your organisation to greater diversity in the skills and experiences that employees can contribute to your mission and vision. Acknowledging transferrable skills and experience also counters traditional gendered views of employment pathways, which do not account for the experiences of all people.

Find further ideas for accessible and inclusive recruitment here: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/node/77761>.

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**10. What methods does your organisation use for induction/onboarding?**

Processes for induction/onboarding should tailor to the needs of various learning and engagement styles. For guidance, visit: <https://includeability.gov.au/resources-employers/creating-accessible-and-inclusive-induction>.

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**11. How are disability related reasonable adjustments negotiated?**

Managers and supervisors need to be approachable for staff to directly discuss and negotiate disability related reasonable adjustments. Organisations are likely to already negotiate reasonable adjustments due to a range of factors. Shifting attitudes to create a conscious commitment to intersectionality and inclusion allows for ongoing negotiations about disability related reasonable adjustments.

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