

TOOL 1.8

Gender Policy Guidance and Sample Gender Policy

- » **GOAL:** To state corporate goals, standards, and expected behaviors around gender diversity
- » **TARGET UNIT:** Human Resources

1. Why have a gender policy?

This tool provides guidance on a key building block for any company's gender strategy: an overarching gender policy. While the strategy is like a team's plan for how to win a game, the policy is akin to the rules of the game. It is essential to have clear policy, to make a clear commitment, and to ensure that all staff are familiar and accountable for a gender-equitable corporate culture. This policy should not operate alone, but complement other HR policies to communicate a comprehensive commitment to gender equity.

The policy should communicate why a company thinks gender diversity and equity is important, i.e., why working towards gender equity is a corporate goal, and how the company anticipates that gender diversity will help the company. The policy should also outline what the policy itself is meant to achieve (for instance, support gender equity, increase equity in promotions, etc.) and what measures the policy authorizes to achieve these ends. Companies should also consider, and state clearly, to whom the policy applies. The policy should apply not only to full-time staff, but also to part-time staff and contractors and suppliers.

2. Key Components of a Gender Policy

- a. Context/Introduction:** This should include brief background on gender issues in the company, and why a gender policy is being developed now.
- b. Purpose:** This section should outline what the policy aims to achieve—for instance, to communicate the company's goals with regards to gender equity, the measures the company commits to in order to realize those goals, and who will be held accountable for adhering to the policy.
- c. Values statement:** The values statement should communicate why the company has a gender policy. This should be a clear signal to staff that gender equality is a core corporate value—and why. For instance, a values statement could outline that gender diversity is important to the company because equality and diversity are core company values, and also out of a recognition that gender diversity (among other types of diversity) are integral to supporting peak company performance. Measures to be used

to achieve gender diversity could include recruitment, retention, and promotion policies that seek to ensure equal opportunities for women and men, as well as respectful workplace policies to ensure that women and men feel safe, comfortable, and valued in the workplace. The gender policy can also outline measures that will be taken to support gender equity in procurement, and in community engagement activities.

- d. Applicability:** To whom does this policy apply? Companies need to decide if the policy will apply to all staff, including contractors. It is recommended that the gender policy apply to all contractors and staff to maintain consistency and standards throughout the organization.
- e. Definitions:** This section can define any key terms used in the policy, including but not limited to:
- i. Gender: Gender refers to cultural, social, cultural, or behavioral norms associated with being male, female, transgender, intersex, and gender diverse, and the relationship between people based on these norms.⁵⁵
 - ii. Employee: Define who is included in the policy (and under the term ‘employee’). It is recommended to say that the term ‘employee,’ as used in this policy, includes all full-time and part-time staff, and all contractors.
 - iii. Gender equality in the workplace: Gender equality in the workplace is the goal that all employees are treated equally, and have the same access to opportunities, compensation or other reward, and resources, regardless of gender.
 - iv. Gender equity in the workplace: Gender equity means fair treatment for all. “It may include equal treatment or treatment that is different, but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities.”⁵⁶
- f. Commitments:** This section should outline specifically what the company plans to do to achieve the values statement. Commitments may be organized around the following themes:
- i. Broadly supporting a gender-aware and gender-responsive workplace culture that all employees and contractors are expected to understand and uphold
 - ii. Commitment that all recruitment, promotions, performance evaluation, and dismissals will be done regardless of gender, and that materials—including recruitment materials and hiring, promotion, and dismissal criteria will all be gender-inclusive and aware. Specific mechanisms could include (but not limited to):
 1. Gender-inclusive language in recruitment materials

⁵⁵ Drawn in part from Western Sydney University (WSU), [Gender Equality Policy](#), WSU, 2017.

⁵⁶ [WSU 2017](#).

2. Minimum standards for participation in shortlists and as interviewers in interview panels. For shortlists, targets for representation of women should reflect a reasonable goal for the context. Interview panels should always include at least one woman, and where the panel is more than four people, it should include at least two women.
 3. Job descriptions and KPIs that do not specify gender or inadvertently disadvantage women applicants
 4. Standards for job interviews that include prohibiting questions regarding gender, family situation, or future family plans, but also include providing information on family-friendly benefits
 5. Regular gender pay gap audits
 6. Gender disaggregation of all HR data, including shortlists, hiring, upgrades, and promotions
- iii. Coordination with the family leave policy, which should outline opportunities for parental leave for both primary and secondary parents, including in situations of adoption, and which can be used before and/or after birth/adoption, as necessary
 - iv. Provisions for workplace gender inclusivity and equity, including zero tolerance for sexual harassment or violence, to be supported by a gender-informed grievance mechanism
 - v. Specific support for staff experiencing domestic violence
 - vi. Provisions to ensure that equipment, PPE, and workplaces are appropriate for staff
 - vii. Support for breastfeeding and/or pumping mothers
 - viii. A code of conduct regarding gender-based violence and sexual harassment
 - ix. Activities to create more equity in procurement, such as reviewing procurement policies for unintended bias, unbundling large contracts, shortening payment intervals, and providing community trainings to increase opportunities for small and local suppliers.
 - x. Integration of gender into all community engagement activities, including increasing inclusive participation in community assessments, decision-making, and monitoring and evaluation.
- g. Responsibilities:** This section should outline who will be responsible for implementing the policy and what their roles will be.
- h. Related Policies:** The gender policy does not operate in a bubble. It may influence other related policies. The gender policy can include a list of related policies and notes on how it should influence them. Related policies may include:

- i. Family leave policy: Family leave policies should allow for adequate time off for employees after the birth or adoption of a child. Policies should allow for leave for both parents, i.e., both primary and secondary parents, even if the other parent works for a different employer. For instance, if a couple has a child and the mother works for a different company, a comprehensive family leave policy would allow the father time off to participate in the early months of the child's life. These policies should apply for both parents, regardless of gender, and should also apply for adoption, where families will also need time to adjust and settle in. This is for the benefit of the family, but also for the company by ensuring that following such major events, employees are able to focus on their families and have the best chance to return to the job able to focus on work.
- ii. Equal opportunity and diversity policy: Many companies have policies speaking more generally to diversity and equality in the workplace. These policies should be coordinated with the gender policy for continuity and complementarity
- iii. Respectful and inclusive workplace policy: Many organizations have respectful and inclusive workplace policies, which often outline the company stance on harassment, bullying, language, and conduct. These policies should complement the gender policy and be updated to ensure that they include and differentiate sexual and gender-based violence and harassment.
- iv. Recruitment and selection policy: The recruitment and selection policy can be updated to reflect gender equity priorities, including a proactive modification of language in recruitment notices and advertisements to be gender inclusive, as well as setting standards for gender equity on shortlists and interview panels.⁵⁷
- v. Procurement policies: Procurement policies address, among other things, how suppliers compete and are evaluated and selected, and payment policies. All of these can impact how well smaller local firms are able to compete with larger firms, and so may impact how well women-owned businesses are in securing contracts.
- vi. Community engagement policies: Community engagement policies outlining how companies engage with the host community should also include specific provisions for how to ensure that consultations, decision-making, and monitoring and evaluation are inclusive, including ensuring women's equal involvement.

3. Sample Policy Template

- a. **Introduction:** *[Background of the company, what has been done on gender, why this is being implemented now]*

⁵⁷ List of complementary policies draw from [WSU 2017](#).

- b. Purpose:** This policy represents [*Company's*] commitment to having a robust and comprehensive approach to gender equality. The policy outlines [*Company's*] dedication to gender equality and outlines [*Company's*] specific commitments towards the goal of a gender-aware, inclusive, and equitable corporate environment. The purpose of this policy is to:
- i. State and communicate [*Company's*] commitment to gender equality
 - ii. State and communicate the measures that [*Company*] is taking to achieve a gender-aware, inclusive, and equitable corporate environment
 - iii. Define and communicate the behavioral standards to which all employees and contractors will be held in pursuit of a gender-aware, inclusive, and equitable corporate environment.
- c. Value Statement:** [*Company*] recognizes and values the diverse skills and perspectives that its employees bring to the workplace. These diverse skills and perspectives are informed by our employees' differences, including their gender. In order to support a diverse staff, and to benefit from these differences, our employees must feel that their workplace is a place of security and fairness, and that all staff are equally valued and have equal opportunities for recruitment, retention, and advancement.
- [*Company*] is committed to realizing gender diversity through informed recruitment, retention, and promotion practices that attract and support a diverse and high-quality workforce. These measures are meant to help [*Company*] to attract, motivate, and retain a diverse, qualified, and motivated workforce, reduce staff turnover, improve productivity, foster innovation and creativity, and build a cohesive, inclusive workforce that allows [*Company*] to operate at peak performance and growth.
- d. Applicability:** This policy applies to all contractors, part-time staff, and full-time staff.
- e. Definitions:**
- i. Gender: Gender refers to cultural, social, cultural, or behavioral norms associated with being male, female, transgender, intersex, and gender diverse, and the relationship between people based on these norms.⁵⁸
 - ii. Employee: Define who is included in the policy (and under the term 'employee'). It is recommended to say that the term 'employee,' as used in this policy, includes all full-time and part-time staff, and all contractors.
 - iii. Gender equality in the workplace: Gender equality in the workplace is the goal that all employees are treated equally and have the same access to opportunities, compensation or other rewards, and resources, regardless of gender.

⁵⁸ Drawn in part from [WSU 2017](#).

iv. Gender equity in the workplace: Gender equity means fair treatment for all. “It may include equal treatment or treatment that is different, but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.”⁵⁹

f. Commitments: In order to meet the values stated above, [Company] commits:

- i. [Company] will actively support a gender-aware and gender-responsive workplace culture which values gender diversity, works towards gender equality, and practices gender equity in all elements of policies, operations, and workplace. Towards this end, all of [Company’s] employees will be supported and expected to understand gender and gender issues, and will be expected to uphold this policy.
- ii. Hiring, advancement, performance management, retention criteria, and promotions will all support equal opportunities regardless of gender. Recruitment, evaluation, and interview materials and promotion and advancement criteria will be gender-inclusive (for instance, in the language used). Recruitment and performance management criteria will not discriminate, implicitly or explicitly, on the basis of gender. Gender will be integrated in all HR reporting, including on gender balance in staffing, corporate governance, and average pay. Specific mechanisms that will be put in place to achieve this goal will include, but not be limited to:
 1. Gender-inclusive language in recruitment materials
 2. Minimum standards for participation in shortlists and as interviewers in interview panels
 3. Job descriptions and KPIs that do not specify gender or inadvertently disadvantage women applicants
 4. Standards for job interviews that include prohibiting questions regarding gender, family situation, or future family plans
 5. Regular gender pay gap audits
 6. Gender disaggregation of all HR data, including shortlists, hiring, upgrades, and promotions
 7. To be coordinated with the family leave policy, improved gender equity in parental leave, including [xxx] days of parental leave for the primary parent and [xxx] days of leave for the secondary parent, regardless of gender. Leave would apply in cases of natural birth or adoption and could be used before and/or after birth/adoption, as necessary. Leave will apply for secondary parents, even if the primary parent does not work at [Company]
- iii. [Company’s] workplaces will be gender inclusive and gender equitable, and all staff will be made to feel valued, fairly treated, and safe. [Company] will have zero tolerance

⁵⁹ [WSU 2017](#).

for behavior that detracts from this environment and will strive to ensure that all workplaces, including accommodation, are safe for all staff, regardless of gender.

- iv. [Company] will have a grievance mechanism with specific training and support for staff experiencing sexual harassment or violence.
- v. [Company] will make provisions to support any staff who are experiencing domestic violence, including up to [x] days of supplemental leave for the purpose of attending court proceedings, consultations or appointments, relocation, or other related activities [potential options might include low interest corporate loans, security support, emergency accommodation for staff and dependents].
- vi. [Company] will aim to ensure that all workplaces, including equipment, PPE, and infrastructure such as changing rooms, toilets, etc., are appropriate and equitable for all genders.
- vii. [Company] will provide paid breaks for breastfeeding and/or pumping and will provide a dedicated space for both, including refrigerator, sink, and electrical access.
- viii. All staff will be expected to sign a code of conduct committing to defined standards of behavior with regards to bias, discrimination, and sexual harassment and violence.
- ix. [Company] will collect gender-disaggregated data to monitor gender diversity of supplier ownership and review procurement policies to ensure that they do not inadvertently disadvantage based on gender.
- x. Community engagement programs will be designed to equitably compensate, support, and empower both women and men.

g. Responsibilities: The following outlines responsibilities for implementing this policy:

- i. All employees, including all full-time and part-time staff, are responsible for upholding this policy and the associated code of conduct
- ii. All contractors doing business with [Company] are responsible for upholding this policy and the associated code of conduct
- iii. Managers, senior managers, and all corporate leadership are responsible for upholding and implementing this policy and the associated code of conduct. They are also responsible for ensuring that staff have the appropriate training and support for implementing this policy.

h. Related Policies: This policy is complementary to the below policies, which also support gender-inclusive and gender-aware measures to reach gender equity across [Company's] operations: family leave policy; equal opportunity and diversity policy; respectful and inclusive workplace policy; recruitment and selection policy.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ This tool draws from several sample gender policies, including [WSU 2017](#) and CARE International "[Final CARE International Gender Equality Policy](#)," June 2018, cited Nov 6, 2020.