

Submission to the Australian Federal Government: Re: Building Women's Careers Program - Risk Analysis and Mitigation Strategies



We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the Building Women's Careers program. After careful review of the program's objectives and potential challenges, we present the following analysis of key risks and proposed mitigation strategies to ensure the program's success in addressing gender disparities in male-dominated industries.

Key to our advice is drawing upon the global evidence and practice of transformational gender equity, the process and approaches required to address barriers to equity including the role of women's organisations in achieving that change. The following advice is also based upon the places and settings that the program will be implemented – male dominated trade workforces – and ensuring that the right systems and structures are in place to be relevant to the context of those environments that is well documented and researched.

Risk: Ineffective Partnerships

Partnerships are crucial for addressing barriers in training and employment pathways holistically. However, inequitable partnerships could lead to fragmented efforts and undermine the program's objectives.

A key challenge for this policy and program is ensuring that partnerships are conducive to transformational outcomes. This requires a foundation of shared mission, resources, and exchange of capabilities. Ineffective partnerships that do not equitably distribute power and resources can lead to imbalanced outcomes. Moreover, if partnerships are not based on shared goals and mutual benefits, they may fail to address the systemic issues the program aims to solve.

Effective gender change partnerships are characterised by diverse and complementary strengths, bringing together expertise from various sectors to address the complex nature of gender inequality. These partnerships require a clear operating model, typically involving a formalised secretariat or a dedicated group focused on supporting collective action towards shared goals. Crucial to their success is rigorous monitoring and evaluation, with partners aligning on a clear measurement framework to track progress and make strategic adjustments as needed.

Community engagement and empowerment are fundamental to successful gender equality work, involving multisectoral action and multilevel stakeholder participation.

This approach creates an enabling environment for gender norm transformation. Government can evaluate these partnerships based on their impact on gender norms and health outcomes, assessing their capacity to engage industry, community, and build social support systems through collaboration. However, it's important to note that targeting individual attitudes alone may not lead to systemic change, emphasising the need for a broader approach.

Case studies and practical examples serve as valuable tools for demonstrating how partnerships support outcomes and align activities with shared goals. Additionally, the Community of Practice (CoP) approach has proven effective in fostering knowledge sharing, mutual learning, and capacity building across institutions. This method supports the implementation of gender equality plans and broader institutional changes by providing external support and legitimacy to change agents. Participation and quality contribution to the CoP process can be evaluated as part of assessing the overall effectiveness of gender change partnerships.

Mitigation Strategies:

- a) Establish clear governance and leadership structures within partnerships including developing shared goals with aligned objectives and strategies through joint workshops and collaborative planning sessions.
- b) Implement transparent decision-making processes and resource distribution. Create transparent mechanisms for equitable resource allocation and establish governance structures that promote power sharing among partners.
- c) Foster inclusive partnerships involving diverse stakeholders. Establish a dedicated secretariat or coordinating body and draft a partnership agreement outlining roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes.
- d) Track progress and assess impact through a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework and conduct regular reviews with input from all partners.
- e) Foster multisectoral action and diverse stakeholder participation, establish a Community of Practice for knowledge sharing, and emphasise systemic change through policy advocacy.

Contract Advice: Include clauses that require partners to:

- Demonstrate equitable resource allocation among partners. Insert provisions that enforce transparent resource allocation and power-sharing mechanisms. Contracts should require equitable distribution of funding, expertise, and decision-making authority among all partner

- Show evidence of inclusive stakeholder engagement and decision making. Contracts should stipulate the establishment of a dedicated secretariat or coordinating body. Include the necessity for a detailed partnership agreement that outlines roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes to ensure accountability and clear governance.
- Establish and run as part of the program, communities of practice that support the development of quality partnerships including developing the skills and capabilities across all organisations to sustain them.
- Require evaluation of projects to be inclusive of partnership outcomes and processes. Require projects to accept that evaluations of projects will be published, and outcomes shared across the program stakeholders for further learning and development of the sector.

Risk: Insufficient Expertise in Gender Equality

Expertise in gender equality is essential for creating safe and inclusive workplace cultures and addressing gendered economic inequality. Without adequate gender equality expertise, the program may fail to implement effective gender-transformative approaches. We are concerned that without ensuring access to this expertise, the program and its activities will fall short of the policy's intended outcomes.

To address barriers entrenched in industry and organisations due to cultural, systemic, and structural factors, specialised expertise is crucial in setting the right conditions for the program. Maximising the long-term benefit of the funding will require a combination of systemic and practical activities, implemented through a shared collaborative partnership. This approach should focus on:

1. Addressing resistance and backlash
2. Supporting workers and teams
3. Tackling intersectional barriers through multi-pronged yet aligned activities
4. Measuring impact clearly

Mitigation Strategies:

- a) Support contracted organisations in developing gender equality practice capacity through shared learning initiatives, such as Communities of Practice.
- b) Clearly define the role and purpose of "women's organisations," emphasising their value to the policy and program as gender equality experts in:
 - Project design
 - Implementation
 - Monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks
- c) Develop and disseminate best practices for gender-transformative approaches through a Community of Practice model:

- Share learnings across contractors and projects
- Strengthen alignment of approaches
- Enhance sustainability of developed skills

Contract Advice: Require contractors to:

- Demonstrate understanding of the role and value of gender equality expertise and the involvement of women's organisations
- Ensure that project plans involve capacity development of the applicants/tenderer to intersectional including gender equity
- Include gender equality experts in their project teams.
- Regularly report on the implementation of gender-transformative approaches and impact.

Risk: Resource Constraints

The sector's limited resources and stretched capacity could hinder the implementation and sustainability of the program. This includes financial, human, and technical resources. Gender transformative practice expertise has been honed in women's organisations, which are often under-resourced and stretched by the demands of their community work.

While collaborative, there is a risk that if the program and policy do not recognise and mitigate this issue, it could expose the sector to the same structural and systemic discrimination typically faced by work predominantly done by women. This could impact the reputation of both the policy and program. It's important to note that the work of equality and equity has historically been carried out by women and women's organisations.

To maximise the potential of this policy moment, careful consideration must be given to managing capacity limitations resulting from this under-resourcing, including:

- Sector burnout
- Limitations on scale-up
- Potential perverse outcomes arising from projects drawing advice from purported gender experts who lack the necessary knowledge and skills for safe, sustainable, and professional gender equity work

Mitigation Strategies:

- a) Ensure proposal assessment includes evaluation of adequate resourcing for involving women's organisations and gender expertise.
- b) Collaborate with the women's movement through existing networks and alliances to plan for appropriate resource distribution.

- c) Leverage existing initiatives and resources to complement the program's efforts.
- d) Foster collaborations that pool resources from various stakeholders.

Contract Advice: Include provisions for:

- Regular financial audits to ensure efficient use of resources including ensuring that gender equity expertise is appropriately remunerated for time spent on driving the change.
- Incentives for contractors who successfully engage with existing networks and leverage additional resources or partnerships.
- Flexibility to adjust resource allocation based on ongoing program needs and effectiveness.

Risk: Ineffective Addressing of Intersectional Barriers

By not addressing intersectional barriers, the Building Women's Careers policy risks perpetuating existing inequalities and potentially exacerbating challenges faced by women belonging to multiple marginalised groups.

A primary risk is exclusion and inequity. Without an intersectional lens, the policy may inadvertently focus on the needs of women from dominant or privileged groups, overlooking unique challenges faced by women of colour, women with disabilities, or those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This could lead to counterproductive inclusion programs that, while well-intentioned, fail to address the complex realities of women with intersecting marginalised identities. For example, career development initiatives that don't consider the needs of women with disabilities may unintentionally exclude them, undermining the policy's overall effectiveness and potentially discouraging their workforce participation.

Furthermore, a non-intersectional approach risks perpetuating systems of oppression and exacerbating economic disparities. Historical data shows that women from marginalised groups often face more precarious work relationships, fewer opportunities for social mobility, and significantly lower earnings compared to their white male counterparts. By not addressing these compounded barriers, the policy may fall short of its objectives, failing to create meaningful change for those who need it most.

Additionally, it might overlook critical issues such as increased rates of bullying and harassment faced by women with intersecting marginalised identities, as evidenced by higher reported rates of such incidents among employees with disabilities in the Australian Public Service. Failure to address these intersectional challenges could undermine efforts to build an inclusive work culture and harm individuals' well-being, ultimately limiting the policy's impact and sustainability.

Mitigation Strategies:

a) Ensure meaningful representation and active participation of diverse women's voices throughout all stages of program design, implementation, and evaluation:

- Include women from various marginalised backgrounds in decision-making roles
- Create safe spaces for open dialogue and compensate fairly for expertise

b) Develop targeted, evidence-based strategies to address specific barriers faced by different groups of women:

- Conduct intersectional research to identify unique challenges
- Implement flexible programs tailored to individual needs, including mentorship and sponsorship

c) Establish equitable partnerships with organisations representing diverse communities:

- Collaborate with grassroots organisations led by and serving marginalised women
- Ensure fair distribution of resources and support capacity-building initiatives

d) Implement comprehensive data collection and analysis practices:

- Collect disaggregated data across multiple identity categories
- Regularly review and adjust program strategies based on intersectional insights

e) Provide intersectional education and training:

- Offer mandatory intersectionality training for all program staff and partners
- Foster a culture of continuous learning and self-reflection on privilege and bias

f) Establish transparent accountability measures:

- Set clear, measurable goals and regularly report on progress
- Create feedback mechanisms for program participants to share their experiences

Contract Advice: Require contractors to:

- Require applicants to demonstrate how they will ensure diverse representation and centre lived experience in decision-making points across the project
- Support equitable partnership agreements with organisations representing marginalised communities, including fair resource allocation.

- Encourage the collection and analysis of intersectional, disaggregated data throughout the project lifecycle.
- Support and encourage implementation of intersectional training for all project staff and partners.
- Mandate regular reporting on goals and outcomes that address intersectional barriers including participant feedback mechanisms.

Risk: Lack of Long-term Sustainability

The Building Women's Careers program faces significant risks if sustainability is not prioritised in its design and implementation. A key concern is the potential for short-term focus, where initiatives may provide temporary advantages but fail to create lasting impact. Without a commitment to long-term systemic change, the program risks seeing a re-emergence of gender inequalities once the initial momentum fades. This is particularly critical in male-dominated trades, where entrenched cultural norms and structural barriers often require sustained efforts to overcome. Moreover, insufficient policy and structural changes within the program could lead to superficial outcomes that do not address the root causes of inequality in these industries.

To be truly effective, the program must target the foundational causes of inequality, such as organisational systems and culture, rather than focusing solely on individual-level interventions. This approach should be coupled with rigorous monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress accurately and make necessary adjustments. The program must also be prepared to address resistance to change within male-dominated trades, as cultural and structural biases can create significant barriers to adopting and sustaining new policies and practices aimed at gender equity. By incorporating strategies to overcome these biases, including comprehensive education and training initiatives that go beyond surface-level awareness-raising, the Building Women's Careers program can enhance its potential for creating meaningful, long-lasting change in gender equity within male-dominated trades, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and diverse workforce in Australia.

Mitigation Strategies:

- a) Systemic Change and Sustainability Planning:
 - Prioritise projects that target structural and cultural changes within organisations and industries.
 - Require detailed exit strategies and handover plans to ensure continuity of outcomes beyond the funding period.
 - Emphasise the development of self-sustaining mechanisms within funded projects.
- b) Robust Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Transfer:

- Establish a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework focusing on indicators of systemic change and long-term impact.
 - Create a knowledge sharing platform for funded projects to exchange best practices and lessons learned.
 - Focus on building internal capacity within funded organisations to carry forward gender equity work independently.
- c) Resistance Management:
- Require strategies for identifying and overcoming resistance to change, providing resources on effective change management techniques.
 - Encourage industry-wide commitments to continue gender equity initiatives beyond the program's duration.
- d) Intersectional Approach and Policy Influence:
- Use program insights to advocate for supportive policy changes that can outlast the program itself, maximising long-term impact.

Contract Advice: Include requirements for contractors to:

- Mandate the inclusion of detailed sustainability and exit plans in all proposals, ensuring continued impact beyond the funding period.
- Implement a program-wide monitoring and evaluation framework that focuses on indicators of systemic change and long-term impact, including regular reporting requirements.
- Prioritise collaborative applications that involve equitable partnerships with key industry stakeholders, emphasising fair resource allocation and shared commitment to ongoing initiatives.
- Require applicants to outline strategies for addressing intersectional barriers and creating inclusive environments, with flexibility for adaptive management throughout the project lifecycle.

Conclusion:

The Building Women's Careers program has the potential to significantly impact gender disparities in male-dominated industries. By proactively addressing these risks through carefully designed contracts, partnership agreements, and ongoing monitoring, the program can drive meaningful and sustainable change. We recommend regular review and adaptation of these strategies as the program progresses to ensure its continued effectiveness in fostering structural and cultural changes that support women's careers.

We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations and are available to discuss further if needed.

WAVE Submission Building Womens Careers program:
Risk Analysis and Mitigation Strategies



Sincerely, [Your Organisation]