

TOOL 1.18**Guidelines for Building a Gender-Diverse Talent Pipeline and Workforce**

- » **GOAL:** To help companies attract a gender-diverse field of candidates
- » **TARGET UNITS:** Human Resources, Community Affairs

A company's best hiring, retention, and promotion policies are built on having a strong, gender-diverse talent pipeline. Traditionally, infrastructure sectors have been heavily male dominated, and this can mean that women, as well as their families and communities, do not think that infrastructure sectors are appropriate places for women to work. This, in turn, can perpetuate the challenge of finding women qualified and interested to work in the sector.

The most gender-equitable hiring practices cannot lead to gender diversity if there are no qualified female applicants. This tool focuses on how to help create qualified candidates in the host community, how to encourage these candidates to apply, and ways to create more opportunity for female candidates to be considered.

1. Create more qualified female candidates

The first step to creating a stronger gender-diverse talent pipeline is to help more women in the community get the training and opportunities that will make them into viable candidates for employment. This is a step that should be undertaken in coordination between the HR and community affairs departments, and can include communication with education and training institutions, as well as with the community itself. HR should meet with community affairs to outline the positions available and the skillsets and qualifications required for successful applications. With this information, community affairs can communicate with local education and training institutions, as well as with the community in general, to encourage more gender-diverse applications. This can include:

- Direct investments to improve local educational and training opportunities
- Scholarships for female students to increase their opportunities to study
- Community outreach to inform the community about the potential for jobs for both women and men, provided that candidates get the training they need, as a way to encourage girls' participation in education/training programs
- Mentorship programs between female staff and female students
- Presentations to current and potential students about the opportunities that may await them.

2. Encourage female candidates to apply

Supporting the growth in the number of qualified female candidates is a necessary precondition, but the next step is encouraging women to apply. Efforts around this can be coordinated between HR and community affairs, and can include initiatives such as:

- **Improve local awareness of opportunities for women:**
 - Communicating with communities on how and where jobs are advertised and how to apply. Information sessions should be organized at times and in places where women are likely to be able to attend; providing childcare can make it more likely that mothers and young women with childcare responsibilities can attend.
 - Organizing webinars and in-person networking opportunities and company tours to give applicants an authentic understanding of how the company works. Creating relationships between the community and the company so community members understand what goes on in the company and the environment and types of jobs available can have multiple benefits beyond encouraging employees to apply.¹³⁷ In areas where there is cultural hesitance around women working in infrastructure industries, improved communication and understanding of what these jobs look like may demystify and help families support women's applications. And in communities where there is a sense that infrastructure companies have jobs but are not creating sufficient local benefits, improved transparency and communication of what the work looks like may help combat these perceptions.
 - Encouraging community members to follow the company on social media and using social media accounts to highlight opportunities for diverse employees.
 - Publicizing strategically: Depending on where work is being done and the host communities, women and men may have different access to certain public forums, different literacy rates, and different ways of sharing information. Thus, certain means of advertising job postings may favor men or women. For instance, public bulletin boards may not be located in areas frequented by men or women, or print advertisements may limit applicants to those who can read—which may not be a necessary job criteria.
 - **Recommendation:** Make sure you are familiar with information access patterns locally and advertise accordingly. Consider using non-text-based means, such as community radio or community forums, to spread the message more equitably.
- **Gender-sensitize recruitment materials:** Recruitment materials may be inadvertently exclusionary or discouraging for female applicants in a number of ways. **TOOL 1.19** offers a detailed job description template outlining strategies to reduce bias and attract diverse applicants, including:

¹³⁷ Samantha McLaren, [How to Create a Diverse Talent Pipeline: 4 Tips from Shopify, PowerToFly and Vrbo](#), LinkedIn 2019.

- **Remove gender-biased language:** Job advertisements that use more male wording are more likely to appeal to male applicants.¹³⁸ To encourage more female applicants, review recruitment materials to screen for gender-biased terms, images, or language. ZipRecruiter found that job advertisements with more gender-neutral language get 42% more responses.¹³⁹ Certain language has been shown to specifically appeal to different genders. For instance, while subtle, terms like ‘analyze,’ ‘competitive,’ and ‘determine’ are more often associated with males, while ‘support’ and ‘collaborate’ are more often associated with females.
- **Recommendation:** Review language to reduce gender-associated words. There are free online tools, often called ‘gender decoders,’ that can help employers determine whether job announcements include gendered language.¹⁴⁰
- Specifically state that the job is open to all genders.
- **Be specific on essential criteria:** Review criteria listed for job postings and eliminate any criteria that are not essential for the position. Research shows that women are more likely to apply to jobs when they meet 100% of the required qualifications; men apply when they have 60%.¹⁴¹ Women are more likely to assume that they won’t be considered without all of the qualifications described as essential, so many prefer not to waste their time by applying.¹⁴² This correlates with research showing that men overestimate their experience and capabilities, while women underestimate theirs,¹⁴³ and a pattern in which women are more likely to be hired based on what they’ve demonstrated they can do, while men are hired on the basis of their ‘potential.’¹⁴⁴
- **Recommendations:** Consider what criteria are genuinely essential, and only include those. Avoid requiring a specific number of years in a given position or experience, which can discriminate against women who took time off for family reasons, and focus instead on necessary skills and experience.¹⁴⁵ Describe job requirements, not the person who will fill the job (or previously filled it). For instance, for physically demanding jobs, describe the specific tasks, rather than describing a ‘physically fit’ candidate.

¹³⁸ Gaucher, Danielle, Justin Friesen, and Aaron C. Key. “Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101.1 (2011): 109-28.

¹³⁹ ZipRecruiter, “Removing these Gendered Keywords gets you more Applicants.” Sept 19, 2016.

¹⁴⁰ One popular example is [available here](#).

¹⁴¹ Bruce M. Anderson, [To Hire More Women – Make This One Simple Change](#), LinkedIn 2019.

¹⁴² Tara Sophia Mohr, [Why Women Don’t Apply for Jobs Unless They’re 100% Qualified](#), *Harvard Business Review*, 2014.

¹⁴³ Williams and Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work*, New York: NYU Press, 2014; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, and Phelan, “Reactions to Vanguards: Advances in Backlash Theory.” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Williams and Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work*, New York: NYU Press, 2014; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, and Phelan, “Reactions to Vanguards: Advances in Backlash Theory.” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 2012.

¹⁴⁵ Bruce M. Anderson, [To Hire More Women – Make This One Simple Change](#), LinkedIn 2019.

- Clearly state required or desirable skills; state any formal trainings/qualifications required (but only require them when they are necessary for the job).
- **Diversify representation in print, radio, and television:** Ensure that both women and men's likenesses and voice are featured in a diversity of roles in print, radio, and television advertisements.
- **Recommendation:** Review recruitment materials to ensure that they present a gender-diverse and inclusive image, including women and men in operational and management roles, as well as in non-traditional roles for women.

BOX 11 | Gendered Terms in Job Descriptions

The following words are classified as 'masculine' in job descriptions, meaning they subtly convey preference for male applicants:

- Strong
- Drive
- Lead
- Analysis
- Determined
- Driving
- Individuals
- Self-Reliant

Source: Talentfoot, "[How to Explain Gender-Neutral Job Descriptions to your Boss](#)," 2020.

- **Signal that you are an employer of choice for women:**
 - **Signal commitment to pay equity:** While concerns about pay equity may not keep women from applying to certain jobs, a demonstration of pay transparency can signal a company's broader commitment to gender equity since women are often paid less than men.
 - **Recommendation:** Include the salary range in the job announcement.
 - **Signal commitment to a family-friendly workplace:** Women may assume that certain employers are more or less flexible and supportive of family commitments. Employers which specifically highlight benefits that appeal to parents like parental leave, flex work, childcare, and health care can encourage parents to apply, especially women who often shoulder more of the family labor load.¹⁴⁶
 - **Recommendation:** List family-friendly benefits associated with the position in the job advertisement.
 - **Include options for flexible work in advertisements:** Clarify whether jobs require standard on-site working hours, shift work, and/or the potential for flexible work arrangements.

¹⁴⁶ ILO, [Break Gender Stereotypes: Give Talent a Chance](#), 50.

- **Strengthen referral pathways:** Due to affinity bias, or our tendency to feel more positively towards people who are similar to us, men in male-dominated sectors tend to refer and hire other men. In the United States, for example, while white men are just 34% of the labor market, they represent 40% of successful referrals.¹⁴⁷ Some companies have taken proactive steps to break up this male monopoly on referrals—the social media company Pinterest specifically encouraged staff to refer more women and minorities and saw a 24% increase in women and even greater numbers of minority candidates. Computer giant Intel took a similar approach by increasing the referral bonus for candidates who represented specific under-represented groups.¹⁴⁸
 - **Recommendation:** Consider providing staff incentives for successful referrals of women.

3. Reduce bias in considering applications

Once women have applied, do they have an equitable chance of being shortlisted and hired as male applicants? Several of the specific types of implicit biases described above often create particular disadvantages for women candidates when job applications are reviewed. To address this:

- **Review applicants equitably:** Due to 'performance bias,' women are often assessed to be less capable than they are, whereas men are assessed to be more capable. As such, women's accomplishments are often undervalued, while men's performance is overestimated. Where they perform similarly, or have similar experiences on their resumes, men are viewed more favorably than women. Studies show that in recruitment, women need to demonstrate more accomplishments and experience to be evaluated as qualified for a job, whereas men are more likely to be viewed as qualified based on perceived 'potential' to do a good job.¹⁴⁹ Several studies have confirmed this tendency: in one, women's names were replaced with men's names, and their chances of being hired rose by 60%. In another famous example, several major orchestras found that 50% more women made it past the initial audition round when reviewers could not see, but only hear, the musicians during their audition.¹⁵⁰
 - **Recommendation:** Remove names and photographs from resumes prior to review.
- **Counteract maternity bias:** Due to a 'maternity bias,' expectations are often different for mothers than for non-mothers or men. Women often have to combat assumptions and stereotypes around motherhood that can start as soon as they're engaged to be

¹⁴⁷ Bruce M. Anderson, [To Hire More Women – Make This One Simple Change](#), LinkedIn 2019.

¹⁴⁸ Bruce M. Anderson, [To Hire More Women – Make This One Simple Change](#), LinkedIn 2019.

¹⁴⁹ Williams and Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work*, New York: NYU Press, 2014; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, and Phelan, ["Reactions to Vanguard: Advances in Backlash Theory,"](#) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, ["Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of 'Blind' Auditions on Female Musicians,"](#) *The American Economic Review* 90, no. 4 (2000): 715–41.

married. Employers assume mothers—or newly married women who they assume will soon become mothers—are less committed to work, including that they wouldn't want to travel or take on challenging assignments. Because of this bias, mothers are also often more severely judged for small mistakes that seem to confirm this assumption of lack of commitment.¹⁵¹ Some U.S.-based research also indicates that including 'motherhood signifiers' on resumes, such as holding a position on a local parent-teacher council, makes women 79% less likely to be hired. And research indicates that mothers are also paid less than non-mothers and men.¹⁵² Men also face similar assumptions when they take time away from work for family reasons, often receiving lower performance ratings and steeper reductions in future earnings.¹⁵³

- **Recommendation:** Ensure that all HR staff are trained on maternity bias in order to identify and address it in the hiring process.
- **Improve fairness in interview panels:** Where sectors or particular positions are heavily dominated by one sex, it can be difficult for other candidates to be considered. (The infrastructure sector is largely male dominated, but particular positions—for instance, certain administrative or lower-level positions—may be predominately female.) This is often due to 'affinity bias,' or the tendency to like and understand those who are similar to us in some ways, as mentioned above regarding referrals. In the interview stage of applications, this can mean that interviewers spend more time interviewing applicants who are like them—for example, male interviewers may spend more time interviewing men and find male candidates more appealing.¹⁵⁴ Having both women and men on interview panels can help significantly. Computer giant Intel started requiring at least two women on interview panels, which helped increase representation of women in new hires from 31.9% to 45.1% over two years, a change attributed to helping reduce unconscious bias in hiring.¹⁵⁵ In addition, developing specific criteria and a standard set of questions of all interviewees can reduce bias and the tendency for interview panels to evaluate candidates based on 'corporate fit' or 'gut feeling.'
 - **Recommendations:** Require that interview panels include women, for instance by requiring that all panels are no more than 75% of one sex (i.e., no more than 75% men or women on any interview panel).

¹⁵¹ Williams and Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work*, New York: NYU Press, 2014; Correll et al., "[Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?](#)" *American Journal of Sociology*, 2007; Weisshaar, "[From Opt Out to Blocked Out.](#)" *American Sociological Association*, 2018.

¹⁵² "[Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?](#)" *American Journal of Sociology*, 2007.

¹⁵³ Scott Coltrane et al., "[Fathers and Flexibility Stigma.](#)" *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 2 (2013): 279–302; Laurie A. Rudman and Kris Mescher, "[Penalizing Men Who Request a Family Leave: Is Flexibility Stigma a Femininity Stigma?](#)" *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 2 (2013): 32–40; Jennifer L. Berdahl and Sue H. Moon, "[Workplace Mistreatment of Middle Class Workers Based on Sex, Parenthood, and Caregiving.](#)" *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 2 (2013): 341–66; Adam B. Butler and Amie Skattebo, "[What Is Acceptable for Women May Not Be for Men: The Effect of Family Conflicts with Work on Job-Performance Ratings.](#)" *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 77, no. 4 (2004): 553–64.

¹⁵⁴ M. Riordan, "[Relational demography within groups: Past developments, contradictions, and new directions.](#)" in G. R. Ferris, ed., *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, vol. 19 (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 2000), 131–73.

¹⁵⁵ Katherine Reynolds Lewis, "Diverse Interview Panels may be a Key to Workplace Diversity," *Working Mother Magazine*, Issue 45, June-July 2017.

- Develop a standardized and transparent recruitment process to reduce opportunities for bias and increase applicants’ confidence in the application process. This can not only increase confidence in hiring decisions, but can also improve relationships between companies and host communities, which may have more faith in how hiring decisions are made.
- Set minimum targets for the number of shortlisted female candidates. If you are using a recruitment firm, confirm that the firm is aware of targets and held accountable for meeting them.
- Develop a policy on appropriate interview questions. Avoid questions regarding marital status, children, intent to have children, or sexual orientation. Review job applications for any questions that may prompt gender bias:
 - Applications should only ask for relevant information and not request details such as pictures, marital status, or age. Where possible, applications should be stripped of gender-identifying details (as well as other factors that are common bases for discrimination) like first names, marital and family status, and age, as well as photographs, before review.
 - Applications should include opportunities for candidates to highlight previous formal and informal work experiences that support their ability to do the job.¹⁵⁶

TABLE 11 | Quick Guide Checklist for Companies

	Recommendation	Implemented?
INCREASING WOMEN APPLICANTS		
Job advertisements/ announcements	Make pronouns inclusive (s/he) or replace with gender-inclusive terms (foreman/forewoman)	
	Include photographs that show women and men, including in non-traditional roles	
	Review job announcements for gender-biased terms. Consider running through ‘gender decoder’ software.	
	Trim ‘required’ qualifications to include only the most necessary qualifications	
	Include salary range in the job advertisement	
	List family-friendly benefits that the employer offers	

¹⁵⁶ International Training Centre of the ILO, [Break Gender Stereotypes: Give Talent a Chance](#), Brussels: European Commission, 2008, 50.

	Recommendation	Implemented?
Improve referrals	Offer incentives to staff for any women hires that come from referrals	
Increase women candidates from recruiters	Include explicit expectations for gender equity in briefs for all recruiters	
Ensure appropriate messaging	Review local information channels and adapt accordingly to ensure local women, including those who are illiterate, hear about suitable job opportunities Have local staff do community outreach and briefings on job opportunities	
INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE HIRING PROCESS		
Review applications equitably	Remove names and photographs from applications for gender-blind review	
Counteract maternity bias	Conduct outreach to all HR staff and interviewers on maternity bias	
Overcome affinity bias	Require interview panels to include at least one woman, preferably two. Create a specific set of questions and criteria for all candidates	

These recommendations are focused on bringing more women into the workforce, and so focus on pre-hiring stages. **TOOL 1.17** focuses on identifying and addressing implicit bias within the workforce among male and female employees.