

**BENALLA**  
RURAL CITY COUNCIL

BENALLA RURAL CITY COUNCIL

**GENDER EQUALITY  
ACTION PLAN  
2022-2025**

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgement of Country</b> .....	3
<b>Message from the CEO</b> .....	3
<b>Our Vision for Gender Equality</b> .....	3
<b>Case for Change</b> .....	3
<b>Gender Equality Principles</b> .....	4
<b>Business Case for Gender Equality</b> .....	5
<b>Legislative Context</b> .....	5
<b>Developing our Gender Equality Action Plan</b> .....	5
<b>2021 Workplace Gender Audit</b> .....	6
<b>People Matter Survey</b> .....	6
<b>Workforce Data</b> .....	7
<b>Meaningful Consultation</b> .....	7
<b>Leadership and Resourcing</b> .....	7
<b>Resourcing</b> .....	8
<b>Measuring Progress</b> .....	8
<b>Gender Equality Action Plan Strategies</b> .....	8
<b>Indicator 1: Gender Composition of the Workforce</b> .....	9
<b>Indicator 2: Governing Body</b> .....	10
<b>Indicator 3: Pay Equity</b> .....	11
<b>Indicator 4: Sexual Harassment</b> .....	12
<b>Indicator 5: Recruitment and Promotion</b> .....	14
<b>Indicator 6: Leave and Flexibility</b> .....	16
<b>Indicator 7: Gendered Segregation</b> .....	18

## Acknowledgement of Country

We, the Benalla Rural City Council acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and to Elders from other communities who may be here today.

## Message from the CEO

This action plan is the culmination of months of work and brings together ideas from our workforce, Council and union representatives. This consultative process alongside the results of the workplace Gender Audit has enabled us to determine how we should best promote gender equality and inclusion across our workforce. Over the next four years we will work to build a shared understanding of gender equality and a shared commitment to progress. The actions we have committed to will promote gender equality across many facets including culture, policy, accountability, and leadership.

Gender equality will benefit our staff by providing a workplace that is safe, respectful, and equitable where everyone is able to fill their personal potential. Increasingly our workforce will reflect the community we serve. This first *Gender Equality Action Plan* (GEAP) will be a learning phase for us all. I sincerely thank everyone who took part in the consultations and encourage you to reach out to a member of the Leadership Team if you have any questions about this action plan.

## Our Vision for Gender Equality

By promoting gender equality and inclusion at Benalla Rural City Council it will help build on our existing workplace practices such as flexible working arrangements to promote gender equality across all departments and levels of the organisation. We commit to learning about gender equality both individually and as an organisation, to integrating what we learn into our future ways of working, to playing our role in our community by leading by example, to acting where we know inequality exists and to communicating what we learn and achieve. We are committed to ensuring that gender equality and inclusion are a core component of our culture and our workplace practice.

## Case for Change

While we have developed this GEAP as a requirement under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* we strongly believe that gender equality will strengthen our performance as an employer as well as our service delivery to community. Through consultation we heard from employees the value they place on promoting and achieving gender equality in the workplace. Key messages that informed the development of the GEAP included:

- *Genuine Engagement:* A desire for the organisation to *listen* openly and authentically to the gendered experiences that people may have in the workplace that either limits or increases their opportunities.
- *Gender Equitable and Inclusive Culture:* A need to prioritise *action* in building a gender equitable and inclusive workplace where gender stereotypes are challenged and dismantled.

- *Diverse:* There is an imperative to promote intersectional gender inequality and build a workplace that reflects the community we serve.
- *Clearly Defined:* Gender equality needs to be clearly articulated and understood across all areas and levels of the organisation and a shared approach to making progress developed.
- *Robust Policies and Procedures:* Organisational policies and procedures need to align to the values and principles of gender equality and enable the GEAP strategies to be fully realised.
- *Leadership:* Leaders need to be reflective of their own values and behavior as well as proactively champion gender equality.
- *Accountable:* Systems need to be developed to ensure that committed actions are delivered and measured to ensure that meaningful progress occurs.

### **Gender Equality Principles**

Our GEAP is underpinned by a commitment to the Gender Equality Principles as defined under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

1. All Victorians should live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities and be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
2. Gender equality benefits all Victorians regardless of gender.
3. Gender equality is a human right and precondition to social justice.
4. Gender equality brings significant economic, social and health benefits for Victoria.
5. Gender equality is a precondition for the prevention of family violence.
6. Advancing gender equality is a shared responsibility across the Victorian community.
7. All human beings, regardless of gender, should be free to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives without being limited by gender stereotypes, gender roles or prejudices.
8. Gender inequality may be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience on the basis of Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation and other attributes.
9. Women have historically experienced discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of sex and gender.
10. Special measures may be necessary to achieve gender equality.

## Business Case for Gender Equality

We believe that acting on gender inequality in the workplace is the right thing to do and will have lasting benefits for both our workforce and our community. Additionally, there is a strong evidence base as to the business outcomes that will bring benefit to Council. Key outcomes for a gender equitable and inclusive organisation include among other things improved:

- efficiency
- productivity
- innovation
- creativity
- employee engagement. <sup>1</sup>

All of these are critical to the long-term success of Council in continuing to meet the evolving needs of our community.

## Legislative Context

Meeting our obligation under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* to make meaningful progress to achieve workplace gender equality also intersects with our commitments to meet requirements under a range of other legislation and agreements, including the:

- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights*, details 20 rights that fall within the key themes of freedom, respect, equality, and dignity. As a public authority, Council is required to act consistently with the rights that are set out in the Charter.
- *Local Government Act 2020* <sup>2</sup>, which requires us to develop and maintain a workforce plan that sets out measures to seek to ensure gender equality, diversity, and inclusiveness
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*, which requires us to take a positive duty to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment, and victimisation in our workplace
- *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* which sets out minimum entitlements, enabling flexible working arrangements and fairness at work and prevention of discrimination against employees
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* which makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their sex, gender identity, intersex status, sexual orientation, marital or relationship status, family responsibilities, because they are pregnant or might become pregnant or because they are breastfeeding.
- Benalla Rural City Council's *Enterprise Agreement 2021* which sets out conditions of employment in our workplace.

## Developing our Gender Equality Action Plan

In order to develop our GEAP we completed a Workplace Gender Audit and undertook Meaningful Consultation. The outcomes of these were used to inform the strategies and measures contained in this GEAP.

---

<sup>1</sup> Workplace gender equality: the business case | WGEA

<sup>2</sup> *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*

## 2021 Workplace Gender Audit

The 2021 Workplace Gender Audit assessed the state and nature of workplace gender equality at Council. The following data sources were used to complete the Workplace Gender Audit:

- **Workforce Data** (workforce data extracted by Council, in line with requirements set out in the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector's *Workforce Reporting Template*).
- **People Matter Survey response data** (survey administered by the Victorian Public Sector Commission, in line with requirements set out by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector).

Both sets of data were analysed against seven audit indicators defined in the *Gender Equality Act 2020*:

- (i) Gender composition of all levels of the workforce.
- (ii) Gender composition of governing bodies.
- (iii) Equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value across all levels of the workforce, irrespective of gender.
- (iv) Sexual harassment in the workplace.
- (v) Recruitment and promotion practices in the workplace.
- (vi) Availability and utilisation of terms, conditions and practices relating to family violence leave; flexible working arrangements; and working arrangements supporting employees with family or caring responsibilities.
- (vii) Gendered segregation within the workplace.

The full results of this audit have been submitted to the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector as per reporting requirements under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. Within this action plan Council has included (where the data exists) the audit results against the *Recommended minimum standard for inclusion of audit data in Gender Equality Action Plans*. These are provided by indicator within the Strategies section of this GEAP.

Additional information about each data source is detailed below.

### People Matter Survey

- The overall response rate for Benalla Rural City Council was 43 per cent.
- The gender breakdown of respondents was 62 per cent *women*, 28 per cent *men* and 10 per cent *prefer not to say* their gender.
- Due to privacy and confidentiality requirements, it is only possible to disaggregate responses by two gender groups which are:
  - Women respondents.
  - Men and Prefer not to say.
  - This merging of *Men* and *Prefer not to say* groups is likely to be masking divergent trends in responses.

## Workforce Data

- Information was extracted from Council's workforce systems as available to complete the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector's *Workforce Reporting Template*.
- Key data gaps were found in relation to intersectional attributes including Aboriginality, disability, cultural identity, and sexual orientation. These gaps will be addressed as a priority within the GEAP.
- Additional data gaps occur across several indicators as information is either not currently reported or not able to be extracted as required. These will also be reviewed as an action under the GEAP with a view to closing these gaps by 2025.

## Meaningful Consultation

Council's approach to consultations was designed to ensure that the obligation under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* to undertake meaningful consultation was achieved. There were four focus group sessions facilitated remotely across Council including:

### Focus Group Consultations

- Employees (women and gender diverse staff)
- Employees (men)
- Executive Management Team
- Council.

### Focus Group Themes

- Visioning for Gender Equality
- Key results of the workplace gender audit (tailored to the group)
- Workplace culture and behaviours
- Flexible Working Arrangements and Caring Responsibilities
- Recruitment and Promotion
- Sexual Harassment and Bullying.

The themes that emerged from the consultation process provided invaluable insight into developing the Strategies and Measures contained in this GEAP.

## Leadership and Resourcing

### Leadership

Council commits to ensuring leadership on the GEAP to ensure that the actions and measures can be achieved. Specific leadership commitments include:

- Leadership Team support of GEAP including quarterly agenda item to discuss progress as a team and identify and address barriers and challenges.
- Accountability is integrated into all of the Leadership Team's KPI's and job descriptions.
- Accountability framework that includes quarterly reporting to the Leadership Team.

## Resourcing

In order to ensure that Council is able to deliver on the program of work contained in this GEAP the following resources have been committed:

- training and consultancy budget allocated annually.
- staffing allocation will be provided within the People and Performance department to deliver the GEAP.
- approximately three hours of training per staff member annually.

## Measuring Progress

As required Council will report every two years to the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector on the progress made through the strategies and measures.

## Gender Equality Action Plan Strategies

### Overarching Strategies

The overarching strategies that have been adopted by Council will ensure that strategies specific to each indicator can be delivered on appropriately and effectively.

No.	Strategy	Actions/Measures	Year
OS1	<b>Establish an effective framework for accountability</b>	Semi-annual reporting of workforce data to Leadership Team.	2023-2025
		Monthly agenda item on Leadership Team meetings.	2023-2025
		Establish cross organisational Gender Equity Working Group with Leadership Groups participation.	2023-2025
		Adequately resource the Gender Equality Action Plan.	2022-2025
OS2	<b>Improve data collection to ensure legislated requirements are met</b>	Investigate existing data gaps in capacity to report on workforce data.	2023
		Improve organisations systems to collect, store and use data.	2023
		Annual campaign to encourage employees to update their personnel records.	2023-2025

## Indicator 1: Gender Composition of the Workforce

Women are often underrepresented in leadership roles, and overrepresented in lower-level roles. This contributes to the gender pay gap and means that organisations may be missing out on the expertise and skills of women at senior levels. By collecting and reporting data on gender composition at all levels, organisations can see where they could benefit from greater gender diversity and take action to support women into senior roles.<sup>3</sup>

Workforce Data	Employee Experience Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall workforce split is 66 per cent women and 34 per cent men.</li> <li>83 per cent of men and 26 per cent of women work full-time.</li> <li>13 per cent of men and 54 per cent of women work part-time.</li> <li>4 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women work casually.</li> <li>Band 8 and above 37.5 per cent women 62.5 per cent men.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>65 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree there is a positive culture in the organisation in relation to employees of different sexes / genders.</li> </ul>

No.	Strategy	Actions/Measures	Year
1.1	<b>Increase women's representation in leadership.</b>	Send participants annually to an Emerging Leader's program with a minimum of 50 per cent to be women.	2023 & 2025
1.2	<b>Increase leaders' commitment, capacity and accountability to promote a gender equitable and inclusive workplace.</b>	Gender Equitable Leadership training for all leaders with direct reports.	2023
		Establish accountability for leaders, updated job descriptions, socialise vision for gender equality.	2023-2024
		Inclusive leadership training for all leaders with direct reports.	2023
1.3	<b>Increase workforce understanding of gender equality.</b>	Whole of organisation Gender Equity and Bystander training program.	2023
		Integrate Gender Equity and Bystander training into induction program.	2023-2025

<sup>3</sup> Workplace gender equality indicators | Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector ([genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au](http://genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au))

## Indicator 2: Governing Body

Boards, councils, committees of management and other governing bodies make important decisions about finances and strategy. It is important that governing bodies have diverse voices at the table. <sup>4</sup>

Workforce Data	Employee Experience Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Council's composition is 71 per cent men and 21 per cent women.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Not applicable.</li></ul>

No.	Strategy	Actions/Measures	Year
2.1	<b>Strengthen intersectional gender data collection for Councillors in order to meet <i>Gender Equality Act 2020</i> data reporting requirements.</b>	Improve data collection processes to align with legislated requirements and communicate purpose and use to Council.	2023-2024
2.2	<b>Improve Council capacity and confidence to lead on gender equality.</b>	Complete Gender Equitable and Inclusive Leadership training.	2023
2.3	<b>Increase representation of diverse candidates standing for election.</b>	Benchmark other Council programs directed at increasing diversity of representation. Develop a plan to build on Council's existing position as accessible to people of all genders and identities.	2023

<sup>4</sup> Workplace gender equality indicators | Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector ([genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au](http://genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au))

### Indicator 3: Pay Equity

The gender pay gap is persistent in Victoria and as of November 2019 stands at 9.6 per cent. In the Victorian public sector, it is 10 per cent. The gender pay gap is driven by several factors, including the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, higher rates of pay in male-dominated industries, and gender discrimination. By collecting and reporting pay data, organisations can see where pay gaps are largest and identify the underlying causes.

Workforce Data	Employee Experience Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On average men at Council earn three per cent (\$2,238) more than women on median base salary and on median total remuneration (salaries are annualised FTE).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not applicable.</li> </ul>

No.	Strategy	Actions/Measures	Year
3.1	<b>Reduce pay gap by undertaking further investigation and developing a plan to address differences.</b>	Investigate pay gap and identify levels within the workforce for increased focus.	2024
		Training for leaders on pay gap analysis.	2024

#### Indicator 4: Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace is common in Australia, including Victoria. It causes financial, psychological, and physical harm to victim survivors. It also has a significant economic cost to organisations and the community.<sup>5</sup>

Workforce Data	Employee Experience Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>0 formal complaints of sexual harassment received.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>10 per cent of women respondents and 13 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in the last 12 months.</li><li>55 per cent of women and 58 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree they feel safe to challenge inappropriate behaviour at work.</li><li>55 per cent of women and 48 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree that Council takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination.</li><li>65 per cent of women and 68 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree that Council encourages respectful workplace behaviours.</li><li>24 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say have witnessed negative behaviour in the workplace in the last 12 months.</li></ul>

<sup>5</sup> Workplace gender equality indicators | Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector ([genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au](http://genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au))

No.	Strategy	Actions/Measures	Year
4.1	<b>Increase organisational commitment to addressing workplace sexual harassment.</b>	Implement all 11 VAGO recommendations in Sexual Harassment in Local Government.	2022 ongoing
		Address behaviours and attitudes through Gender Equity and Bystander training ( <i>also under indicator 1 and 7</i> ).	2023 ongoing
		Develop leader's guide on responding to sexual harassment and provide tailored training.	2023
		Review mandatory Sexual Harassment training through an intersectional gender lens.	2023
		Review Contact Officer Program.	2024
4.2	<b>Improve data collection to meet the requirements of the <i>Gender Equality Act 2020</i> for indicator 4.</b>	Develop process to assess complainants' satisfaction of formal complaints of sexual harassment.	2022

## Indicator 5: Recruitment and Promotion

Gender bias and gender stereotypes can influence recruitment, promotion, and career progression practices. This means that women may not have access to the same career opportunities as men. Other forms of disadvantage and discrimination can also have an impact, limiting career opportunities for women from different backgrounds, such as women with disability or older women.

Data on recruitment and promotion outcomes can show where women's careers are stalling and help identify strategies to create more equal opportunities. <sup>6</sup>

Workforce Data	Employee Experience Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Composition of new recruits for FY 21 was 64 per cent women and 36 per cent men.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>45 per cent of women and 42 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agreed that the organisation make fair recruitment and promotion decisions, based on merit.</li><li>49 per cent of women and 55 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agreed they have an equal chance at promotion in the organisation</li><li>51 per cent of women and 48 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say with the statement that disability is not a barrier to success.</li><li>61 per cent women and 48 per cent men and people who prefer not to say with statements that being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are not a barrier to success.</li><li>65 per cent of women and 68 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree that people in their workgroup actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace. 57 per cent of women and 55 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree that senior leaders actively support diversity and inclusion in the workplace.</li></ul>

<sup>6</sup> Workplace gender equality indicators | Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector ([genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au](http://genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au))

No.	Strategy	Actions/Measures	Year
5.1	Promote gender equality through recruitment.	Explore merit with leaders.	2023
		Review recruitment and implement changes as required.	2023
		Train appropriate staff on Gender Equitable and Inclusive Recruitment.	2024
5.2	Strengthen career development practice.	Track and report on measures related to career development.	2022-2024

## Indicator 6: Leave and Flexibility

Flexible working arrangements and leave entitlements including parental leave help Victorians of all genders balance paid work with other responsibilities. But structural and cultural factors mean women are far more likely than men to work flexibly, especially by working part time, and taking longer parental leave. On average women do nearly twice as much unpaid work as men. It's important that defined entities collect clear data on who is accessing flexible work so they can see what extra support might be needed. By encouraging more men to work flexibly and take leave to care for children or others, organisations can contribute to a more equal gender balance in unpaid work.

Family violence causes significant trauma to a victim survivor, which can affect their ability to work. Victim survivors may worry about consequences if they try to remove themselves from the violent situation. This may include the perpetrator attending the workplace, or missing work to attend to housing and legal matters. Family violence leave supports victim survivors to manage the impacts of their experience. It also promotes an organisational culture that does not accept family violence.<sup>7</sup>

Workforce Data	Employee Experience Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Women accessed 60 per cent of carers leave and men 40 per cent</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>76 per cent of women and 61 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree Council would support them if they needed to take family violence leave.</li><li>75 per cent of women and 61 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say are confident that their request for flexible work would be considered.</li><li>84 per cent of women and 74 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree they have the flexibility to manage work and non work activities and responsibilities.</li><li>59 per cent of women and 45 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say believe that flexible work is not a barrier to success in the organisation.</li></ul>

<sup>7</sup> Workplace gender equality indicators | Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector ([genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au](http://genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au))

No.	Strategy	Actions/Measures	Year
6.1	<b>Increase access to people of all genders and from all areas of the organisation to access flexible working arrangements.</b>	Make recommendation through the Enterprise Agreement to support gender initiatives.	2024
		Develop protocols for implementation of flexible work arrangements.	2023
		Leaders model flexibility and lead conversations as part of performance management.	2023
		Pilot program to support men to work flexibly.	2023-2024
6.2	<b>Promote positive culture in relation to family/caring</b>	Benchmark best practice parental leave (super/progression/access etc.).	2024
		Leaders' role modelling.	2023
6.3	<b>Increase education on family violence</b>	Continue to participate - 16 days of Activism – workforce.	2022-2025
		Develop a family violence policy.	2023
		Develop leaders guide for responding to family violence.	2023
		Train leaders on responding appropriately to disclosures of Family Violence.	2023

## Indicator 7: Gendered Segregation

Women make up a higher proportion of certain occupations and industries, while men are more represented in others. This gendered segregation is driven by gendered norms and stereotypes about what work is appropriate for men and women, as well as structural factors including access to flexible working arrangements. Gendered workforce segregation reinforces gender inequality and widens the pay gap, as the average pay is lower in industries and occupations dominated by women.<sup>8</sup>

Workforce Data	Employee Experience Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>dominated by women</b>, professionals (71 per cent women) and clerical administrative workers (85 per cent women), Community and Personal Services Workers (91 per cent women).</li> <li>▪ <b>dominated by men</b>, technicians and trade workers (80 per cent men) and labourers (65 per cent men).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 63 per cent of women and 58 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree that the organisation uses respectful images and language.</li> <li>▪ 82 per cent of women and 61 per cent of men and people who prefer not to say agree that in their workgroup work is allocated fairly, regardless of gender.</li> </ul>

No.	Strategy	Actions/Measures	Year
7.1	<b>Promote a safe, inclusive and respectful workplace culture.</b>	Roll out whole of organisation Gender Equity and Bystander program ( <i>as per indicator 1 and 4</i> ).	2023
		Apply an intersectional gender lens to bullying policy and process.	2023
		Apply an intersectional gender lens on communication policy/engagement strategy and develop guidelines for inclusive language at Council.	2023-2024

<sup>8</sup> Workplace gender equality indicators | Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector ([genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au](http://genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au))



# **BENALLA**

**RURAL CITY COUNCIL**

Benalla Rural City Council  
March 2022

PO BOX 227  
BENALLA VIC 3671

(03) 5760 2600  
[council@benalla.vic.gov.au](mailto:council@benalla.vic.gov.au)

[www.benalla.vic.gov.au](http://www.benalla.vic.gov.au)