

# DIVERSITY MATTERS

## WORKPLACE POLICIES 101

Practically actionable and inspirational workplace policies can make the world of difference to how your business operates.

### WHAT ARE WORKPLACE POLICIES?

“A workplace policy is a statement which underpins how human resource management issues will be dealt with in an organisation. It communicates an organisation’s values and the organisation’s expectations of employee behaviours and performance.”

Workplace policies can be presented in written, visual, aural or physical (braille) format, and should be accessible to all employees regardless of ability.

### WHY DO WORKPLACE POLICIES MATTER?

Robust, topical workplace policies can make your business more diverse, innovative, agile and profitable. They help you clearly articulate what your business’s values and ethics are, what you expect of your employees’ (and your own) behaviour, and how you will go about managing your business in a consistent, ethical way.

### WORKPLACE POLICIES CAN HELP YOU:

- Improve Occupational Health and Safety risks
- Improve mental and physical health and wellbeing of all employees
- Embrace and capitalise on workplace diversity (culturally diverse, women, LGBTQIA, people with a disability, Indigenous Australians etc.)
- Foster a safe, supportive workplace for all employees
- Combat sexual harassment and gendered violence in the workplace
- Combat workplace bullying
- Create a positive, energised workplace culture
- Create an environmentally sustainable/ ethical business
- Improve business agility and innovation
- Improve talent acquisition and retention strategies
- Improve productivity and profit
- Become better placed for future growth
- Comply with employment and other legislation

### EXAMPLES OF WORKPLACE POLICIES

There are a variety of workplace policies and procedures your business can implement, and you probably have quite a few in place already. Examples include:

- Occupational Health & Safety (OHS)
- Code of conduct
- Recruitment policy
- Anti-bullying & harassment in the workplace
- Anti-discrimination policy
- Workplace sustainability & ethics
- Combating work-related gendered violence
- Privacy policies and procedures
- Internet and email policy
- Mobile phone policy
- Drug & alcohol policy

## STEP 1: GET STARTED

- Identify the workplace policies you want/need to implement or improve on. This may be as simple as how work email and phones should be used, or as complex as a brand-new workplace sustainability policy.
- Make sure that management are on board with the proposed policy creation or changes, understand why it's needed, and support it 100%.
- Have conversations with your employees about what matters to them and what they find troubling – it might point to a policy lack your business needs to address.
- Identify staff to lead or take part in the research and creation of the policies internally. Chances are that your employees are passionate about various things: identify those who can provide valuable input to the policy issues you want to address. For example, when creating a policy to combat gendered violence at work, it's a good idea to speak to those most vulnerable to it and let their suggestions and input lead the way.
- Collect data on your workplace to better understand the current status quo. For example: how often does your company recycle or purchase sustainable office supplies? How can you improve on your track record?
- Assess your workplace against existing standards and best-practice policies to determine priorities.
- Understand the “why” of what you are doing (why it matters, why it is a problem, why you should get on board) before you start – this will help you take things seriously. For example:

Gendered violence in the workplace leads to physical and mental harm, loss of productivity, mental health issues and potential legal concerns for the business. It is an unacceptable Occupational Health & Safety risk, but also an ethical matter: caring for your employees and making sure their workplace is a safe space for all benefits society and business. Turning a blind eye causes immense harm, both to your employees and your business's reputation.

## A WORKPLACE POLICY SHOULD:

- set out the aim of the policy
- explain why the policy was developed
- list who the policy applies to
- set out what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour
- set out the consequences of not complying with the policy
- provide a date when the policy was developed or updated.

Review your policies regularly and update as and when necessary. Remember to keep employment and other relevant law changes in mind when updating or creating your policies.

## RESOURCES AND TOOLS TO USE

These links provide valuable tools and resources that can help inform your workplace policies and procedures.

- Apprenticeship Support Australia (ASA) offer a range of free best-practice advice and tools to help you improve your workplace culture: [www.apprenticeshipsupport.com.au/Employers/Mentoring-Support](http://www.apprenticeshipsupport.com.au/Employers/Mentoring-Support)
- Visit the Our Watch website for standards, strategies and tools to help develop a culture of workplace equality and respect. [www.ourwatch.org.au](http://www.ourwatch.org.au)
- WorkSafe Victoria March 2020 guide on work-related gendered violence and sexual harassment: [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/work-related-gendered-violence-sexual-harassment](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/work-related-gendered-violence-sexual-harassment)
- NSW Industrial Relations Workplace Policies and Procedures checklist: [www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au/employers/nsw-employer-best-practice/workplace-policies-and-procedures-checklist](http://www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au/employers/nsw-employer-best-practice/workplace-policies-and-procedures-checklist)
- CitySwitch advice on Workplace Policies for Sustainability: <https://cityswitch.net.au/Resources/CitySwitch-Resources/Building-performance/Building-performance-article/workplace-policy-for-sustainability-2>

## STEP 2: CREATE POLICY AND RELATED PROCEDURES

- Adapt or create your policies based on your assessment, research, stakeholder input and expert input.
- Consult and gain feedback and input from staff, key experts and stakeholders involved in the process.
- Assess your new policies against best-practice standards and policies.
- Develop practical procedures to follow in response to policy concerns.
- Develop a long-term strategy to keep policies and procedures updated and current.
- Develop an immediate action plan to communicate policies and implement procedures effectively.

## STEP 3: TAKE ACTION

- Get loud! Communicate your policies and procedures internally as widely as possible, to all staff and stakeholders.
- Host regular, effective training, refresher or information sessions to help staff better understand the policies, and how the procedures relate to them at work.
- Communicate the policies and procedures that you're proud of externally: for example, on your website or social pages.
- Make sure that the practical processes and procedures are in place to support staff who need it.
- Communicate the good news stories where applicable and appropriate.
- Make sure robust, supportive complaint processes exist.
- Don't silence or stigmatise victims or people who speak up.
- Do not tolerate or allow a sexist, racist or anti-difference workplace culture that accepts inappropriate jokes or behaviour.
- Take part in programs that teach employers and employees alike what sexual harassment/ anti-diversity/ cultural insensitivity is, how it causes harm, and how to prevent it.

## FIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR WORKPLACE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

1. Remember: what you allow is what you get. If leaders, executives or management aren't on board with the policies and procedures, this will set the tone for the rest of the workplace. Send unambiguous messages, take a firm stand and make it clear that the policies apply to everyone.
2. Put your money where your mouth is: if your policy states that sexual harassment is unacceptable, your procedures should address it immediately, effectively, and in a way that does not further ostracise or victimise the complainant. If your policy states that you buy sustainable or ethical office supplies, don't stock the communal kitchen with harmfully produced or unrecyclable supplies. Policies and procedures will only be trusted and followed if they are seen to work – and improve the workplace.
3. Write your policies in clear, simple terms. Use respectful, gender-neutral language, and avoid jargon.
4. Communicate your policies in auditory, visual, physical and written formats to be accessible to all people. If your workplace is multi-lingual, consider making your policies and procedures available in all the most prevalent languages.
5. Put robust systems in place that prioritise physically/ mentally safe, consistent and speedy outcomes for all parties involved – your employees need to know that they can trust the system. Where supervisors tolerate bad behaviour and complaints are ignored or discouraged, permissive conditions exist. In these workplaces, perpetrators become bolder and victims see no point in complaining.