GENDER EQUALITY IN ADVERTISING & COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES

FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CITY OF MELBOURNE

Women's Health VICTORIA

sh=qual

ADVERTISING EQUALITY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

shEqual, the City of Melbourne, Women's Health Victoria and the State of Victoria respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land that we work on. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

These guidelines were produced by City of Melbourne, Women's Health Victoria and Spry PR & Communications with the help of many agencies and organisations.

Particular thanks to the local governments which took part in the consultation workshops to help shape the guidelines:

Ararat Rural City Council

Banyule City Council

Baw Baw Shire Council

Brimbank City Council

City of Ballarat

City of Casey

City of Darebin

City of Glen Eira

City of Greater Bendigo

City of Greater Dandenong

City of Kingston

City of Port Phillip

City of Stonnington

City of Whitehorse

City of Whittlesea

East Gippsland Shire Council

Golden Plains Shire Council

Greater Shepparton City Council

Hepburn Shire Council

Hindmarsh Shire Council

Hobsons Bay City Council

Knox City Council

Loddon Shire Council

Maroondah City Council

Moorabool Shire Council

Moreland City Council

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Murrindindi Shire Council

Pyrenees Shire Council

Rural City of Wangaratta

Southern Grampian Shire Council

Warrnambool City Council

Yarra Ranges Council

Introduction

Advertising shapes our beliefs and attitudes. Sexist advertising contributes to a culture of violence against women. But diverse and realistic representations of women, girls and gender diverse people can help change that culture.

As local government organisations, our advertising and communications can act as a positive force in achieving gender equality.

Our advertising and communications should show progressive portrayals of all people, where diversity and gender equality is the norm.

Victoria's Gender Equality Act 2020 commenced on 31 March 2021. It requires public entities, including councils, to support the identification and elimination of systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs and delivery of services in our workplaces and in the communities we serve.

These guidelines aim to help you embed gender equality, diversity and inclusivity in your advertising and communications and to represent everyone in the local community with equality and fairness.

We also hope they help you better understand the impacts of sexist advertising and how you can have an impact.

How to apply these guidelines

These guidelines have been written for communications and marketing staff as well as individual staff members across council departments. We recognise that at many smaller rural and regional councils, responsibility for content creation sits with individual staff members.

The guidelines should be applied flexibly, especially for digital and social media content. This content needs to meet audience engagement and algorithms. The tone of voice, nuance, and search terms influence digital content creation, and these guidelines may not always apply.

Local governments communicate with audiences in a broad range of ways. For example, we use communications marketing and advertising to promote programs and services, arts, grants, sponsorship, procurement, businesses, international relations, tourism and events.

You can apply these guidelines to:
- video, photography, advertising creative briefs
- brand guidelines, language and corporate style guides
- communications materials
- guidelines to engage service providers, including graphic designers
- image libraries and photo captions
- social media advertising, marketing and posts
- websites and blogs
- marketing and advertising content and placement
- promotional materials for activities, events and festivals
- community engagement frameworks and online engagement platforms
- internal communications platforms.

You can also integrate the guidelines within other local government policies and processes across all areas of operation, including internal communications, procurement, human resources, business support, community services, planning and building, arts and culture, libraries and customer service.

Six guiding principles to achieve gender equality

Following these six principles will ensure you achieve gender equality in every aspect of your marketing, communications and advertising campaigns.

1.

Show people of all genders with equal value, status and respect.

2.

Make sure your content creation teams are diverse or have had diversity training.

3.

Avoid gender stereotypes that are harmful, limit choices and perpetuate false assumptions about people.

4.

Avoid objectifying women and don't depict male dominance or disrespect towards women.

5.

Build gender equality into your policies and practices.

6.

Create progressive portrayals of all people.

The checklists below go into more detail to help you focus on every aspect of your campaign.

Gender equality in advertising and communications helps prevent violence and discrimination against women and gender diverse people by strengthening positive, equal and respectful relationships.

Checklists for content creation

1

Show people of all genders with equal value, status and respect

☐ Ensure the overall impression of any communication feels natural and authentic and, where possible, promotes gender equality. Ensure that content includes women, men, trans, non-binary, gender diverse and LGBTIQ+ people.

☐ Depict diversity across ethnicities, body shapes and sizes, sexualities, ages, ability, religion, class, language, education.

☐ Ensure you accurately represent your local community in your photos/images and communications.

☐ Consider intersectionality, for example, representing a woman in a wheelchair from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background and be attentive to power dynamics not being replicated, for example, men in dominant positions.

☐ Avoid showing women as being peripheral in men's lives or portrayed as demanding and interfering with men's freedom, leisure time and relationships with male friends.

☐ Depict men in a variety of non-traditional roles and settings, such as caring/nurturing roles, doing unpaid or voluntary work, being in a supporting role.

☐ Include people of all genders at work in a variety of situations and leadership roles.

☐ Consider using illustration rather than photography in complex or sensitive instances, such as depicting violence against women. In addition, visual communications such as information graphics, signage, animation, video and process diagrams may benefit from using an illustrated approach.

☐ Use captions to explain the context of images. For example, rather than assuming that the two people in the image identify as a woman and a man, you could describe the image this way: two people sitting in a park.

2

Make sure your content creation teams are diverse or have had diversity training

☐ Involve women, trans, non-binary and gender diverse people at every step of the creative and production process.

☐ If you are a team of one, then consider asking others from within your organisation to review content with a diversity lens.

☐ Do your content creation team/ consultants understand how different communities like to be represented?

☐ Use language that is non-offensive and inclusive. For example, 'spokesperson' rather than 'spokesman,' 'chair' or 'chairperson' rather than 'chairman', and 'firefighter' or 'police officer' instead of 'fireman' and 'policeman'.

☐ Use inclusive pronouns unless you can ascertain pronouns. For example, use 'they, them, theirs' rather than him, him, her, hers, or her. Use gender-neutral phrases where possible. For example, when referring to a couple in a relationship, use 'partner or spouse' rather than 'husband and wife.'

☐ Consult with local population groups, including women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ communities and those who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

☐ Ensure the talent both in front of and behind the camera is diverse and representative of your local community.

3

Avoid gender stereotypes that are harmful, limit choices and perpetuate false assumptions about people

☐ Avoid stereotyped representation of gender roles. For example, the content might show family members making a mess while a woman is responsible for cleaning it up. This content suggests that cleaning up is inappropriate for boys because it is stereotypically associated with women, and men fail to undertake simple household tasks.

☐ Use portrayals that challenge gender stereotypes and traditional views of gender norms, behaviours and stereotypes. For example, a woman getting ready for work and her husband looking after the children or a male kindergarten teacher reading a book to the children.

☐ Don't use humour, artworks or historical settings to stereotype people — for example, a young mother in the kitchen baking muffins.

☐ Show diverse participation from different genders (including non-binary and gender various people), backgrounds and abilities.

☐ Do not use harmful masculine stereotypes or old ideas about masculinity that emphasise aggression, control and hyper-sexuality — for example, tall, brawny male surf lifesaver saving a young girl in a bikini from drowning.

☐ Reflect the reality of diverse family settings and working practices, including multi-generation households, single mother or father-led families, and other non-nuclear family set-ups.

☐ Normalise positive values and behaviours such as respect, kindness, bravery, toughness, shyness, expressing emotions from all genders, ages and cultures.

4

Avoid objectifying women and don't depict male dominance or disrespect towards women

☐ Don't use inappropriate and exploitative sexual imagery. For example, don't include hyper-sexualised representation of women or depicting women as sexually available. In addition, do not equate women's value with attractiveness.

☐ Avoid reproducing idealised bodies; diversity is important.

☐ Avoid showing women and men as objects and displaying only parts of their body such as legs, lips, buttocks, breasts, chests.

☐ Avoid violent images in advertising. Only include violence if it is an integral part of a community education campaign (for example, a campaign to reduce or address family violence). Where you use violent imagery or content, include content warnings and a helpline number.

☐ Do not include portrayals that show male peer relationships that emphasise aggression, men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence. An example is using humour to show that men can manage female partners with lies and deception.

☐ Do not include portrayals that condone violence against women and girls and show disrespect towards women. For example, men putting women down or yelling at their children, making sexist jokes and comments, interrupting, talking over and speaking for women, or thinking or saying women' belong' in specific roles.

☐ Include men displaying healthier forms of masculinities and respect towards women. For example, men and boys calling out sexism, jokes or language that belittle women and girls, men and boys equally sharing food shopping and meal preparation responsibilities, and men and boys showing emotional vulnerability and sharing feelings of sadness, fear, shame, kindness and joy.

PRINCIPLE 5

Build gender equality into your policies and practices

☐ As required under the Gender Equality Act 2020, embed gender equality into your corporate processes and templates. For example, gender equality should be part of your creative briefs and tenders, image guidelines and libraries, language and corporate style guides, contract terms, staff and agency recruitment, community engagement frameworks and online platforms.

☐ Facilitate regular training for your communications, community engagement, social media and marketing staff to help them understand how to apply gender equality to their work.

☐ Seek advice from prevention of violence against women and gender equality experts within and outside your organisation (for example, women's health agencies) and people with lived experience.

☐ Use VicHealth's Framing Gender Equality Message Guide when developing key messages and approaches.

PRINCIPLE 6

Create progressive portrayals of all people

☐ Apply the Unstereotype Alliance's 3Ps framework to all marketing communications to create progressive portrayals of all people. First, assess your communications and marketing materials using the Bechdel test (https://campaignbechdel.com/about/).

Presence — who is featured in the communication?
- Who is portrayed in the communication? Who is the central character?
- Does the communication feature a range of people representing the cultural and ethnic mix in the market? For example, consider gender, age, race, socio-economic status, body size, sexual orientation, religion and ability.
- Do the characters feel authentic and recognisable?
- Has the character been considered when placed in the context of the copy, clothing, positioning, naming etc? Does the whole piece of work add up to a positive portrayal?

Perspective — who is framing the story?
- Who is directing the action? Who is the person whose perspective you are representing?
- Do we see the personal experience and perspective of the character?
- Who is driving the narrative?
- Is there any objectification or sexualisation?
- Is there diversity in the creative teams?
- Is this work challenging outdated perspectives in society about people/communities/relationships/norms?

Personality — the depth of the character
- Where could diversity help originate powerful storytelling?
- How diverse are the creative team and their inputs? Do they understand how different communities like to be represented? How will diversity be reflected in various ad formats/lengths?
- Do the characters come across as empowered and in control of their lives?
- Do the characters have three-dimensional personalities? For example, are they funny, bold, eccentric and authoritative?
- Is beauty a dimension of personality rather than just about physical appearance and attraction?
- Is there a stereotypical interpretation of beauty? Tall, thin, fair for women, tall, macho and strong for men?

Resistance and backlash

If you are working to promote gender equality and tackle inequality, you can expect to meet resistance. It may occur in any setting. It may come from individuals or collectively and from anyone.

Here are some resources to help you prepare for, address and reduce backlash against the progressive portrayal of people in your advertising, marketing and communications:

> VicHealth (En)countering resistance: strategies to respond to opposition to gender equality initiatives

> OurWatch Workplace Equality and Respect: practice guide dealing with backlash

> Women's Health West Speaking publicly about preventing men's violence against women: Curly questions and language considerations

Definitions

Gender equality

Gender equality involves equality of opportunity and equality of results. It includes the redistribution of resources and responsibilities between men, women, gender diverse and non-binary people, and the transformation of the underlying causes and structures of gender inequality to achieve substantive equality.

It is about identifying disadvantages and taking action to improve diversity and ensure equal outcomes for all. Often this requires women-specific programs and policies to end existing inequalities.

Gender inequality

Gender inequality is the unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity, and value afforded to men, women and non-binary people in society due to prevailing gendered norms and structures.

Four key expressions of gender inequality drive violence against women:
- condoning of violence against women
- men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence
- rigid gender roles and identities
- male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

Gender equality in advertising

Gender equality in advertising shows women, men, trans and gender diverse people as diverse and equal. It reflects a diversity of ages, ethnicities, body shapes, sexualities, aspirations and roles. Gender equality avoids stereotypes, sexualisation and objectification. It does not show degradation or violence against women.

Sexist advertising

In its various forms, sexist advertising can depict gender-based discrimination, use outdated gender roles and stereotypes, promote unrealistic and unhealthy body ideals, and represent violence against women (Gurrieri & Hoffman 2019). Common themes in sexist advertising include:

- **Underrepresentation:** the way advertising portrays people is far from representative of society. Most characters are young, white, able-bodied and heterosexual, and there are twice as many males as females.
- **Gender stereotypes:** of women and men, girls and boys. Women are portrayed as homemakers, mothers, wives and girlfriends. Men are typically depicted as powerful and independent, often shown in work settings, reinforcing stereotypes that masculinity equals physicality and action, and femininity equals nurturing and concern with physical attractiveness.
- **Sexualisation and objectification:** women are sexualised and objectified, or hypersexualised—depicted as sexually available.
- **Depictions of male dominance and violence against women:** normalising violence against women.
- **Masculine peer culture and male dominance:** rigid gender stereotypes are one of the underlying causes of violence against women. A common theme, often presented under the veil of humour, is that men can manage demands made by female partners with lies and deception. The portrayal of men lying to their partners about gambling is a clear example. Both Tabcorp and online betting agency Ned have breached advertising codes with such ads.

What is the impact of sexist advertising?

- Advertising plays an influential role in shaping social and cultural norms within society. For example, research shows that sexist advertising negatively impacts children's development and gender roles, adult gender roles, body image and mental health and attitudes towards women and violence against women.
- Children's ideas about what is considered appropriate for boys and girls — their implied interests, behaviours and roles — are strongly influenced by the marketing of children's products.
- Sexist advertising contributes to a culture of violence against women. Exposure to objectifying imagery also influences perceptions about who is responsible for rape.
- Masculine peer cultures in advertising promote aggression and disrespect towards women and denigrate women.

What are the benefits of gender equality in advertising and communications?

- The promotion of gender-equitable advertising and communications gives the interests, needs and priorities of all genders equal consideration.
- Gender equality unburdens men from unhealthy and limiting forms of masculinity and ensures the visibility of women, trans, non-binary and gender diverse people in our community.
- Consumers are also increasingly looking for companies that affect a positive change in society. As a result, brands and companies that deliver progressive advertising have higher purchase intent and satisfaction for all consumers, especially women.
- Most importantly, it helps prevent violence and discrimination against women and gender diverse people by strengthening positive, equal and respectful relationships.

HELPFUL LINKS

- Acon Language guide: trans and gender diverse inclusion
- Australian Association of National Advertisers Code of Ethics 2021
- City of Melbourne's Building respect and equity among children
- Diversity Council Australia Words at work: Building inclusion through the power of language
- Our Watch
- shEqual advertising equality campaign
- shEqual Community responses to gender portrayals in advertising
- shEqual Connecting the dots — How sexist advertising drives violence against women
- Rainbow Health Victoria Pride in Prevention Messaging Guide

- shEqual Reporting sexist advertising: a toolkit for consumers
- shEqual Seeing is Believing A national framework for championing gender equality in advertising
- Unicef Promoting Positive Gender Roles in Marketing and Advertising
- Unstereotype Alliance
- Unstereotype Alliance 3Ps framework
- VicHealth Framing gender equality message guide
- VicHealth Healthier Masculinities Framework
- VicHealth Resistance and Backlash to Gender Equality: An evidence review

- Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020
- Victorian Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector
- Victorian Government LGBTIQ+ inclusive language guide
- Victorian Government Achieving gender equality in communications
- Victorian Government Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy
- RMIT Addressing and preventing sexist advertising
- Women's Health in the North Communications Guidelines for Preventing Violence Against Women
- Women's Health Victoria Advertising (In) Equality: the impacts of sexist advertising on women's health and wellbeing

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