



EXECUTIVE & MANAGEMENT RECRUITMENT

ENCOURAGING WOMEN APPLICANTS



Office of Equal Employment Opportunity
Government of Western Australia

The Government's new Equity and Diversity Plan requires that objectives be set for women in management for each organisation in the Western Australian public sector. It is important to recognise through the restructuring occurring as a result of Machinery of Government changes that opportunities may be provided to increase the proportion of women in management.

When I announced the Plan in January 2002 I indicated that, for each of the groups covered by the Plan, strategies would be developed on an ongoing basis. This booklet, *Executive and Management Recruitment: Encouraging Women Applicants* is one of these strategies aimed at increasing the proportion of women in senior management positions.

I encourage you to use the practical approaches outlined in this booklet to ensure improvements in the position of women in management in your organisation.

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PREMIER

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1. INTRODUCTION

This publication is intended to provide a guide to attracting more women applicants to senior executive positions in the Western Australian public sector. Some practical examples are offered to illustrate how using these strategies can result in getting the best applicant for your vacancies.

2. WHAT CAN YOU OFFER?

Consider what your organisation can offer that would build a reputation as an employer of choice among women and attract female applicants to apply for executive/management positions. Profile this prominently in all your communication about the job. For example:

- Flexible working practices.
- Family friendly workplace policies.
- A values driven culture.
- Opportunities to develop.
- Openness to encouraging women.
- A focus on people and innovation.
- Identify what is 'unique about your organisation' that would be of interest to potential job applicants.
- Develop simple but professional communication tools to promote the organisation as an employer.
- Devote a section of the web page to issues of interest to potential candidates e.g. benefits and working conditions, family friendly workplace, testimonials, positive results of employee surveys, flexible working conditions, commitment to training and development.

3. GETTING A GENDER BALANCE IN APPLICANTS

3.1 Active Encouragement

Actively encourage highly talented women with potential to apply. You need to convey that you do not have to be already in senior management positions to be considered eligible. In all your communication about the job, for example, in advertisements and search processes, and in informal networking and discussions, make it clear that you are looking for transferable skills, ability, potential and NOT setting great store on public sector hierarchical position and/or continuous years of experience in the workplace.

CASE STUDIES

What Others Have Done

○ **Department of Justice**

The then head of Court Services Division in the former Ministry of Justice wanted to ensure a gender balanced field of applicants. The Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment circulated the following notice to a public sector senior women's network.

"You may not have noticed these recently advertised jobs. Richard Foster, from Court Services Division in the Ministry of Justice asked for help in ensuring a gender balanced field of applicants.

Richard was quoted in the most recent edition of the Office of EEO publication, The Key –

'My message to women seeking a career in senior and middle management is that Court Services is open for business.'

You might like to encourage any suitable women in your network to consider these jobs.

There are four Level 9 etc"

Details of jobs and where to get application kits was included.

Some of the responses were:

"Thank you for the information. I requested the kit but then became ambivalent when considering whether it was another male dominated environment. Richard Foster certainly espouses the right words – I may have a busy weekend! I will also pass on to others."

"Thank you for pointing out the vacant positions. I must say I was very interested when I noticed them some time ago, but felt that perhaps I didn't have the content knowledge. However I have now called for the application kit and will consider it carefully. Many thanks."

○ **J P Morgan**, securities and investment bankers, have a *War for Talent* web site that they use as their main platform to spread the message that their goal is to be '*the most attractive place to work for the very best people*'. The web site:

- Profiles non-traditional role models within the organisation to '*demonstrate that success has many styles*';
 - Encourages applications from people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
 - Provides a summary of initiatives completed or underway within the organisation, for example, staff development opportunities and flexible work initiatives; and
 - Posts Morgan's human resource policies.
- The site received 25,300 'hits' in its first year of operation.

○ **Alcoa** advertised for graduates using the headline "*Your biggest job isn't always at work*". The advertisement focussed on what they believe is their distinct advantage as an employer – a concern for staff successfully balancing a career with life outside work.

3.2 Using Consultants

If using a search firm, brief the consultant on the need to produce a gender balanced field of applicants. This needs to be stated clearly in your contract with the consultant. Continue to insist, at the various stages of the process, that the consultant fulfils the obligations of the contract. To be successful the consultant may have to use a variety of headhunting techniques not routinely used, for example, tapping into broader networks, such as female professional associations, asking other senior women, private sector contacts, community groups etc.

3.3 Advertisements

Write job advertisements that are free of public sector jargon and speak directly to the applicant. Emphasise a supportive, flexible culture and profile your organisation's values. If you are using graphics or photographs ensure these include both men and women.

As an example, you could convey your organisation's willingness to consider flexible work practices with statements such as: "Flexible work arrangements including and may be negotiated."

The challenge for organisations is to ensure that their recruitment advertisements and job information kits are worded in such a way as to encourage female applicants. These recruitment materials should attract attention, create a positive impression and offer a real benefit that motivates prospective applicants to submit an application.

When scanning the employment columns in any newspaper it becomes apparent that the advertisements that stand out are those that:

- Use graphics – these should emphasise diversity.
- Have eye catching headings and exciting copy.
- Speak to the prospective applicant, rather than merely describing the job.
- Present a distinctive, positive corporate image of a values-driven culture rather than just describing the organisation in functional terms.

3.4 Extending the Search

You should state up front, in all your job documentation and advertisements, that should the initial field not contain enough female applicants, you will extend the search until you have achieved an improved gender balance.

CASE STUDIES

What Others Have Done

- The former **Department of Resources Development** trialled a new advertising format for a position that had previously been advertised but no applicants were suitable. The new format sought to attract a higher quality and range of applicants, particularly from outside the public sector. The reformatted advertisement emphasised career development opportunities and potential and presented the reduced work-related requirements in a conversational style of text.

- The **Adelaide Community Health Care Alliance (ACHA)** ran a series of advertisements using a cartoon layout with minimal text. They placed 'spotter' ads in different parts of the recruitment notices to direct readers to their main ads. They reported receiving significantly more applications, from such extremely high quality applicants that they could have chosen any of the shortlisted applicants. (see Attachment 3).
- **Daimler Chrysler** ran the following advertisement in U.S. Black Engineer magazine. *"A workplace that works creates an almost audible hum, a buzz that means people are inspired, confident and passionate about what they do. At Daimler Chrysler we bring together all kinds of people with their richly varied origins, perspectives and life experiences. And then they perform, drawing on their diversity to enrich and enhance the finished products. Together they create the harmony of our workplace."* (quoted in *HR Magazine* October 1999).

4. ASSESSING SUITABILITY

4.1 Transferable Skills

Think laterally about where women may have gained valuable experience. Check your assumptions about the transferable skills of women in female dominated professions such as health and education: they could form a substantial pool of talented female applicants who have managed large secondary schools and health services with more than 100 staff and large budgets.

4.2 In the Interview

Be discerning about who you put on the panel. Where possible, be on the panel yourself. Either way, it is important to brief your panel clearly. They need to be alert for skills and competencies that are transferable to the position. Make it clear that they should not be locked into thinking there is only one career path to the top in the public sector: that hierarchy/level and years of experience are not paramount.

Brief the panel on what qualities you are looking for: the panel members need to develop a shared understanding of the concept of 'leadership qualities' and preferred styles. The panel needs to ensure that these qualities, sometimes referred to as 'soft skills' (for example, the ability to coach, mentor, support, motivate others, create cooperation, redefine values and realign management focus), have not been downgraded or under-weighted in the selection process.

The interpretation of selection criteria by the panel is crucial. Ensure the panel is not looking for years of experience in industry specific areas. Think laterally about where women may have gained relevant skills and experience.

The panel needs to be aware of the fact that research shows that women have a tendency to down play their certainty whereas men have a tendency to minimise their doubts. Research indicates women have a tendency to be 'self-deprecating' rather than 'self-enhancing'. Women also tend to use collective pronouns when discussing their achievements at interview and

answers may be more team focussed than those of male applicants. Female applicants may offer quite different behavioural examples to answer the same interview questions, for example, the way in which they resolve conflict. These essential differences in style need to be understood and appreciated by selection panels. The experience of male CEOs indicates that senior women are often very high achievers in the 'difficult', 'tough' aspects of change management. Some examples of achievements which may be described differently by women than men, and hence, 'downplayed' in the eyes of traditional panellists are:

- The capacity to build strong, cohesive teams and inspire commitment to the organisation's business goals.
- The ability to successfully lead difficult and often complex reforms and engage employee support for such reforms, for example, cultural change programs, restructures, new policy development and implementation etc.
- The capacity to enable people to be productive and reach their full potential.

4.3 Identifying Leadership Qualifications - Measuring the Soft Stuff with Hard Questions

In an article in the Harvard Business Review (May – June 2000) *Don't Hire the Wrong CEO* an approach to getting information about the 'soft skills' was outlined.

It is easy enough to measure a candidate's financial successes, but how can you measure the 'soft' qualities of leadership? The best approach is to interview a candidate's superiors, peers, and direct reports. They might not always give you a full account of a candidate's ability to move human hearts, but the following kinds of questions can get you very close.

- *Does the candidate lead consistently in a way that inspires trust in followers?*
- *Does the candidate hold people accountable for their performance and promises?*
- *Is the candidate comfortable delegating important tasks to others?*
- *How much time does the candidate spend developing other leaders?*
- *How much time does the candidate spend communicating the company's vision, purpose, and values? Do people down the line apply the vision to their day-to-day work?*
- *How comfortable is the candidate sharing information, resources, praise, and credit?*
- *Does the candidate energise others?*
- *Does the candidate consistently demonstrate respect for followers?*
- *Does the candidate really listen?¹*

¹ Adapted from: *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 2000) 'Don't hire the wrong CEO'

4.4 Numerical Ranking

Merit selection processes have often relied on all the selection decision-makers ranking each applicant (usually numerically) against all the work-related requirements. While this process is meant to result in a perception of equity and impartiality in decision making, it often requires an artificial juggling of each decision-makers' assessments to establish the applicant who is clearly the most meritorious, that is, to establish who is 'first past the post'.

The reality of selection decisions may be that there are several applicants who are competitive and suitable for the position, each possessing their own strengths and unique experiences. Rather than do a numerical ranking of the meritorious applicants, organisations desiring more innovation in their selection processes may elect to make a final selection decision based on other organisational considerations such as:

- Building a team with complementary skills.
- The desire for greater workforce diversity.
- The opportunity to recruit more applicants with a broad range of work experience.

Making a final selection decision based on other than a numerical ranking against criteria is designed to be an inclusive, not exclusive, strategy; to widen the diversity of the field, not narrow it. To ensure that such a strategy does not lead to capricious or indefensible decisions, it is imperative that it be linked to workforce planning strategies, or search plan rationales that were drafted prior to the commencement of the recruitment process.

5. PROVIDING THE RECRUITMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

Public sector organisations, in order to comply with the Recruitment Standard, should be able to defend their selection decision in terms of establishing that the 'most suitable' person has been selected for the position. Before the selection decisions are made, organisations should write a rationale for the selection process that establishes what the organisation is looking for in the 'most suitable' applicant. This will enable the organisation to be better placed to defend choices that do not rely on numerical and often artificial rankings of applicants. See Attachment 2 for a sample Recruitment and Selection policy for Attracting Women Applicants for Management Positions.

6. MONITOR WHAT IS HAPPENING TO WOMEN IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Record data on the progress of women through the recruitment process. This will provide you with information to assess if:

- (1) you are not attracting enough women applicants through advertisements or women are being put off by job information kits
- (2) if women are being shortlisted in similar proportions to their application rate
- (3) if women are being shortlisted but not being selected as the candidate for appointment

	Applications		Shortlisted		Appointed	
Management Tier	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Positions at Tier 2 Management						
Positions at Tier 3 Management						

or

	Applications		Shortlisted		Appointed	
Occupational Level	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Position(s) ...						
Position(s) ...						

CASE STUDY 1 - UWA

USING SEARCH PROCESSES AND INVOLVING TEAM MEMBERS IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

Issues:

The University of Western Australia is aware that their academic culture focuses on collegiality and the inclusion of departmental and faculty staff in decision-making. For this reason it was considered important that the selection of senior staff involved others in University governance. The University was also aware that conventional advertising often did not produce the best field of candidates internationally and few women tended to apply for senior positions.

Actions:

- ✓ All academic positions to be filled have a **search plan** (a UWA sample search plan for female applicants is attached).
- ✓ The plan indicates what action will be taken to identify and encourage applications from the best candidates internationally and from suitably qualified women.
- ✓ The selection process does not move from the receipt of applications to final shortlisting until a field of excellent candidates is achieved. i.e. the time-line for receiving applications may be extended depending on the quality of the applicant pool.
- ✓ Candidates for academic positions are asked to enclose a teaching portfolio with the application.
- ✓ Shortlisted candidates are asked to conduct an open seminar which members of the department, students and others may attend.
- ✓ For senior positions, shortlisted candidates attend a departmental meeting and individual meetings are scheduled with senior members of the faculty and the University.
- ✓ Members of the department and faculty, following the meetings and seminars, may provide comments on the candidates to the selection panel. Comments are usually in writing and may be discussed as part of selection committee deliberations.

Results:

- ✓ The search process increases the quality, international standing and diversity of applications.
- ✓ Academic candidates are assessed on the basis of a portfolio of work, performance in a real work activity, i.e. a teaching, research or management seminar, as well as based on interviews, referee and external assessor reports.
- ✓ The time spent with shortlisted candidates is longer and there is an opportunity for informal as well as formal discussion.
- ✓ There is opportunity for input to the process from other members of the department, students, faculty and senior staff, while the final decision remains with the selection committee.

ATTACHMENT 1

UWA SAMPLE SEARCH PLAN FOR WOMEN

The Department of ----- has been aware of the need to fill the current vacancy for some time and the members of the department have given serious consideration to what is needed to meet our longer-term objectives. We have identified an important change in the nature of our student body over the last few years. Over 25% of the undergraduate students in the department are now women and there are increasing numbers of female post-graduate students. We are also attracting significant numbers of overseas students.

At present, however, there are no women academics in this department and in the past we have had few applications from women. Our department discussions have identified meeting this emerging need as a priority. Therefore we are particularly keen to attract a range of highly qualified women applicants to this position.

During the past year members of staff have been using the opportunity at professional conferences to meet academics working in this area, especially women, and to note their areas of interest. We kept a file on these and added to this file the names of those women who have previously completed their doctorates. All members of staff have also been asked to review contacts within their professional networks in order to identify potential applicants or institutions with strong graduate programs in the advertised area.

In order to attract high quality applicants from a more diverse range of people, as well as more applications from women, we intend to act as follows:

1. The advertisement will be worded to encourage applications from women, for example: 'women are particularly encouraged to apply'.
2. The position will be advertised with the possibility of filling it with two fractional appointments.
3. We are writing to all universities with strong reputations in the advertised area asking them to disseminate the information about the position. We have engaged a post graduate student to analyse some of the recent literature in this area and to identify institutions and individuals whose research interests appear relevant so that they can be individually targeted.
4. We are contacting professional associations and, where they exist, women's sections of those associations. To encourage women to apply we will ask for the names of women working in the field in which selection is to take place and send them the advertisement and selection criteria. We will also ask for an advertisement to be inserted in any women's newsletters of these bodies.
5. We are keen to attract staff with a commitment to encourage female doctoral students and who can work successfully with a wide range of cultural backgrounds. This is included in the selection criteria.

ATTACHMENT 2

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION POLICY - FOR ATTRACTING WOMEN APPLICANTS FOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

This organisation has determined that women are under-represented in management structures compared to their representation in the organisation as a whole. Implementation of strategies to achieve a better gender balance in senior management is required to ensure that women are provided with equal opportunities regarding their employment, as well as providing improved management and service delivery through a greater diversity of input into decision making. The lack of women in management limits the diversity of inputs provided to agency planning, development of policy, and design of services provided to the West Australian community. It is this organisation's belief that greater diversity of inputs will assist in developing and providing more relevant and appropriate services.

This organisation has been aware for some time that its senior management is predominantly male and that many women have not in the past seen that they have a career path to senior management. Positive strategies will be implemented to attract and recruit women to senior management positions. The development and implementation of these strategies is provided for under section 31 of the *Western Australian Equal Opportunity Act 1984*, as measures intended to achieve equality.

In order to attract a more diverse range of applications this organisation intends to carry out the recruitment process in the following manner:

- Using gender neutral wording for selection criteria and including criteria that relate to the ability to provide quality services for both women and men and to successfully work with and develop both women and men for future management roles.
- Including comments in advertisement that women are encouraged to apply.
- Advertising the position with the possibility of filling it with two fractional appointments and informing applicants that flexible working arrangements can be negotiated.
- Wording the advertisement, designing graphics and pictures and placing the advertisement in appropriate publications to make the position attractive and visible to women.
- Using recruitment agencies to conduct searches in Western Australia and interstate prior to the closing date for the advertisement.
- Asking senior management in this organisation and other agencies to disseminate the information about the position to potential women candidates. This will include forwarding the information about the position through the SES network, in particular to women in the SES, to seek their assistance in encouraging women to apply.

- Asking professional associations and, where they exist, women's sections of those associations for the names of women working in the field and sending these women the advertisement and selection criteria.
- Using recruitment agencies to continue to conduct searches after the closing date if there is not a suitable number of women applicants. The selection process will not commence until there is a suitable gender balance in the applicant pool (if this is to be done it is important to indicate in the advertisements that this may occur).

When an appropriate number of women applicants has been obtained, competent and competitive applicants will be selected based on merit including the capacity of the applicant to fully meet the work-related requirements of the position.

This organisation has determined that those applicants who meet all the work-related requirements of the position and are competitive will not be ranked numerically, but rather will be placed in a pool of 'competitive applicants' from which the final appointment will be made. The decision on who to appoint will consider the business needs of the organisation including the need for a better gender balance in management as well as considering the specific work-related requirements of the position.

In this way the diverse backgrounds and experiences of each competitive applicant, including a consideration of the diversity of input they will bring to management in the organisation will be considered. This phase of the process will ensure that the mix of applicants appointed better reflects the need for a gender balance in senior management. It will also ensure that equal opportunities are offered to women previously under represented in this organisation's management team.