



SAGE

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

Guidance on Intersectionality

for the SAGE Athena Swan
Accreditation Pathway

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document is for **SAGE Institutions** following the SAGE Athena Swan Pathway in Australia.

It provides guidance on incorporating a consideration of **intersectionality** into all parts of the SAGE Athena Swan Accreditation Pathway.

You may also like to access recordings from the [Intersectionality series](#), which provides practical support to help you take an ethical, intersectional approach to gender equity, diversity and inclusion work in your organisation.

For further information, consult the SAGE website, or contact the SAGE team.

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WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Intersectionality recognises that a person’s identity is shaped by a range of factors including age, cultural and linguistic background, disability status, gender identity and expression, intersex status, religion and belief, sexuality, and socioeconomic background. These factors intersect to constitute an individual with unique lived experience and, as a result, unique thinking, knowledge, skills, and networks (Fig. 1).

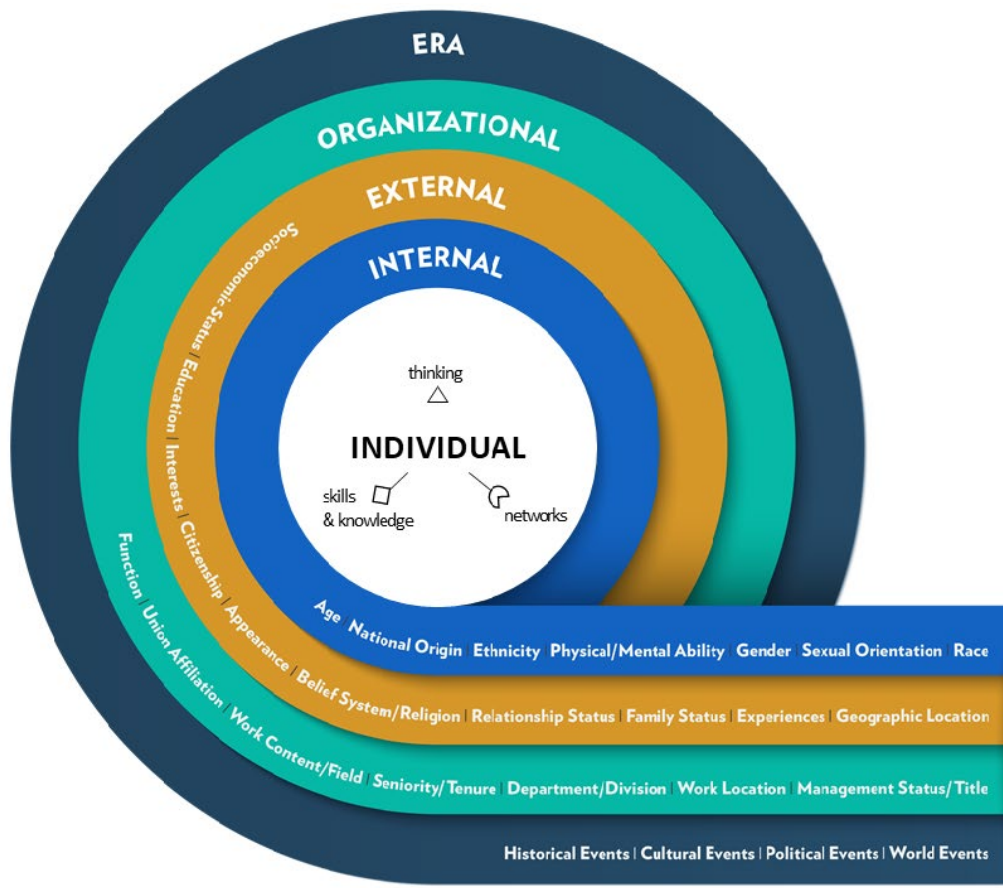


Figure 1. The aspects of an individual’s identity interact to create a unique individual with intrinsic diversity of thinking, and acquired diversity of knowledge and skills, as well as networks.¹

However, Intersectionality is not primarily about identity. Rather, it interrogates how identity interacts with systems and structures to manifest and compound disadvantage and amplify inequity.

The concept of Intersectionality was introduced in the late 80s by Kimberlé Crenshaw,² whose work focused on the intersection of race and gender. Crenshaw highlighted how, by

¹ Thomas C, MacMillan C, McKinnon M, Torabi H, Osmond-McLeod M, Swavley E, Armer T and Doyle K (2021) ‘[Seeing and overcoming the complexities of intersectionality](#)’, *Challenges*, 12(1):5.

² Crenshaw K (1989) ‘[Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics](#)’, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1):8.

viewing racial and sex discrimination as distinct issues, the law failed to adequately consider the experiences of black women. Being both black and female, these women are subject to discrimination based on their race, their gender and, often, a combination of the two.

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and disability intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the macro social structural level.

Bowleg, 2012³

Positionality

In our work, it is useful also to remember that as well as compounding **disadvantage, privilege and advantage** may also compound (Fig. 2).

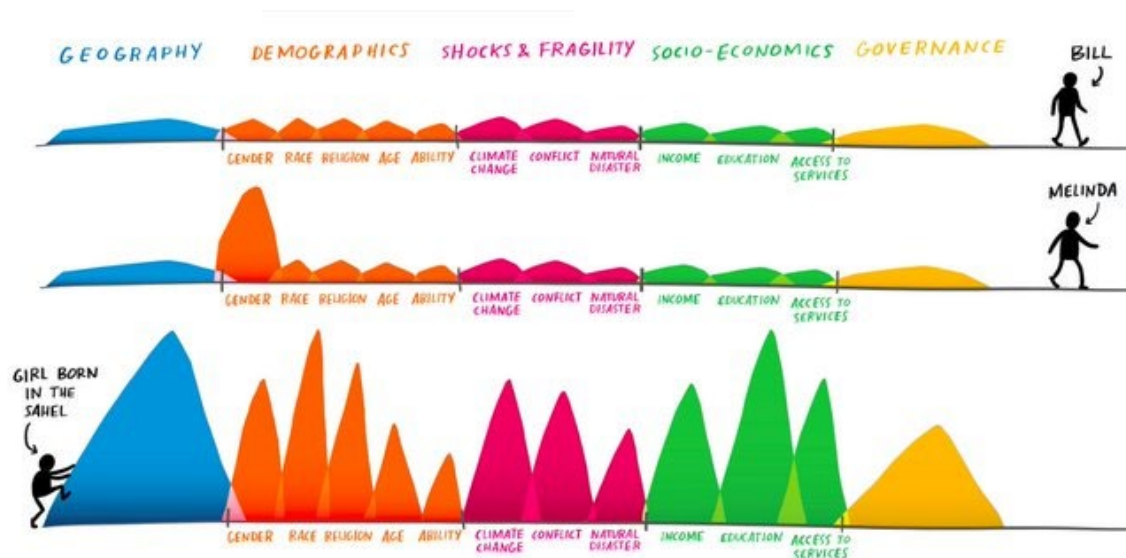


Figure 2. For Bill and Melinda Gates, advantage and privilege has compounded to provide a relatively easy path through life. For a girl born in the Sahel, one of the poorest regions in the world, disadvantage compounds. Achieving a healthy, productive life requires overcoming hurdle after hurdle after hurdle.⁴

³ Bowleg L (2012) 'The problem with the phrase women and minorities: intersectionality - an important theoretical framework for public health', *American Journal of Public Health*, 102(7):1267–1273.

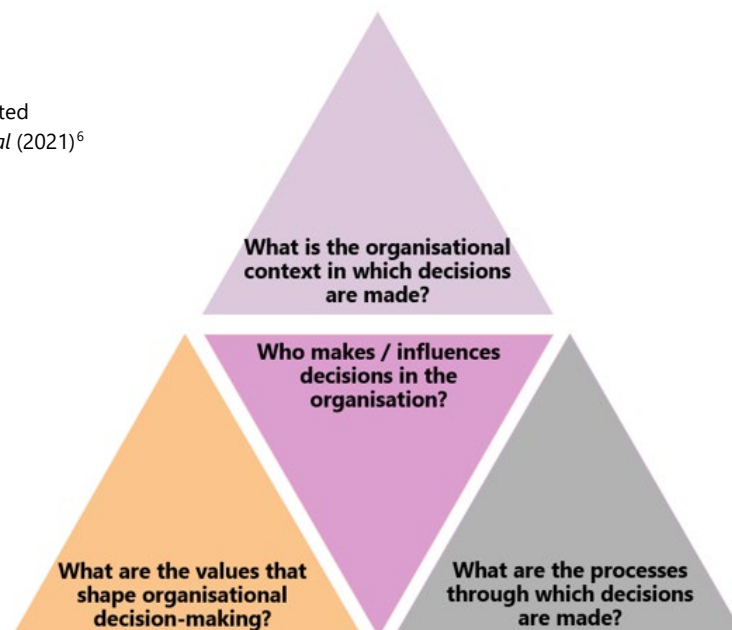
⁴ Image from <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/goalkeepers/report/2019-report/#ClimateAdaptation>

Positionality refers to how differences in social position and power shape identities and access in society. It is important for GEDI practitioners and researchers to reflect on their **individual positionality** “to identify their own degrees of privilege through factors of race, class, educational attainment, income, ability, gender, and citizenship, among others” for the purpose of analysing and acting from one’s social position “in an unjust world.”⁵

It is also helpful to consider **organisational positionality** in terms of power and privilege in the institution, for example by considering:

- What are the values, demographics, and histories of the organisation?
- Which people or groups hold power and/or privilege within the organisation? Are there certain social identities that might be markers of privilege – or, conversely, of marginalisation – within the organisation?
- Where does organisational power or privilege come from? What are the values within the organisation that confers this power and privilege on certain people or groups, and not on others?
- What are the structures and systems through which organisational power and privilege are gained, expressed, and perpetuated?
- What kinds of power and privilege are embedded within your own role within your organisation?

Diagram adapted
from Topp *et al* (2021)⁶



⁵ Duarte, M.E. (2017). *Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet Across Indian Country*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

⁶ Topp SM, Schaaf M, Sriram V, Scott K, Dalglish SL, Nelson EM, Rajasulochana SR, Mishra A, Asthana S, Parashar R, Marten R, Quintas Costa JG, Sacks E Rajeev BR, Reyes KAV and Singh S (2021) 'Power analysis in health policy and systems research: a guide to research conceptualisation', *BMJ Global Health*, 6(11).

WHY IS INTERSECTIONALITY IMPORTANT IN THE SAGE ATHENA SWAN FRAMEWORK?

Until recently, many organisations focused their attention on increasing diversity by creating strategies to recruit and retain underrepresented groups. While it is true that each 'diversity group' has its own set of challenges that need to be understood and addressed, these siloed approaches rarely accounted for the ways in which various aspects of a person's identity interact to create additional challenges and barriers. As such, initiatives to address the needs of a particular group often **only truly assisted a subset of the group**.

Example: Intersectionality and Recruitment

The Coolabah Institute identified a lack of gender balance, with 80% of its staff being women. It determined that it must improve diversity in recruitment and, through a series of actions designed to remove the barriers to recruiting men and other genders, it successfully achieved a 40:40:20 gender balance. However, when the organisation turned its attention to cultural diversity, it became aware that it had, unintentionally, only recruited white men. While gender diversity in the organisation had improved, there had been little change to other forms of diversity.

A siloed approach to increasing diversity risks perpetuating or worsening inequities in other diversity dimensions. A focus on one dimension of identity sends a subtle message to those with additional historically marginalised identities that some parts of their identity are more important, and more valued, than others. For example, an Aboriginal woman working for an organisation that is actively taking a 'gender equity first' approach may feel excluded by the implication that being Aboriginal (and the inequities she experiences because of that) is of lesser importance than her gender.

While the SAGE Athena Swan framework has a focus on gender, Intersectionality reminds us that people of any particular gender identity are not a homogeneous group. For institutions to gain a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of staff and students, and the barriers to attraction, retention and progression, they need to adopt an intersectional approach to their self-assessment process.

Example: Intersectionality and Pay Gaps

A 2018 report⁷ in the UK found clear evidence of gender and ethnicity pay gaps in Higher Education. The report found that:

- Typically women earn less than men.
- Most broad ethnic minority groups earn less than both White men and White women.
- Black men and Black women earn the least on average relative to White men.
- There was no evidence of a compounded pay gap for Black women with no pay gap between Black men and Black women.
- There is a significant pay gap between Asian men and women, suggesting an intersectional or compounded pay penalty due to both ethnicity and gender.
- Overall, the pay penalty experienced by ethnic minority women in the sector is more likely to be due to factors associated with their ethnicity than their gender.

These findings demonstrate that an intersectional approach is required to move beyond the simplified claim that men earn more than women. Indeed, it appears that while actions to eliminate the gender pay gap may benefit White women, for **women from ethnic minority groups**, a focus on reducing the **ethnicity pay gap** may be of greater benefit.

Similarly, Intersectionality must be considered when **devising and implementing actions** to remove or reduce these barriers, and when **evaluating the impact of actions**. Not doing so runs the risk of only addressing the barriers faced by a subset of the target group, for example improving the lot of white, heterosexual, cisgender women without disability, to the exclusion of other women.

If we aren't intersectional, some of us, the most vulnerable, are going to fall through the cracks.

Kimberlé Crenshaw⁸

⁷ Hopkins L and Salvestrini V (2018) *Caught at the crossroads? An intersectional approach to gender and ethnicity pay gaps in higher education*, Universities and Colleges Employers Association.

⁸ McRobbie S (2019) *The rise of intersectionality*, Woroni website, accessed 16 February 2021.

Example: Intersectionality and Speaker Panels

Many organisations have implemented some version of the Panel Pledge, in which individuals pledge to 'increase the visibility and contribution of women leaders in public and professional forums'.⁹ However, most of these pledges are not explicitly intersectional, meaning that gender balance of speakers could be achieved without consideration of other forms of diversity. Revising the pledge and its wording to encompass speaker diversity more broadly takes an intersectional approach to the initiative and is more likely to result in the elevation of the voices of a diversity of women and people of other genders.

WHAT DOES SAGE EXPECT IN TERMS OF INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS AND ACTION PLANNING IN THE ATHENA SWAN AWARD APPLICATIONS?

At **all levels** of the SAGE Athena Swan process, Institutions are expected to collect and analyse data through an intersectional lens **wherever possible**.

Recognising Athena Swan's focus on gender, Institutions are expected to address, at minimum, the following intersections when applying for a Bronze Award:

- Gender and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background
- Gender and cultural background
- Gender and disability status
- Gender and sexuality

Institutions may also choose to demonstrate their consideration of other characteristics that intersect with gender, such as age, socioeconomic background, religion or belief.

Further, Institutions may conduct more multivariate analysis, for example by considering *gender × cultural background × sexuality*. A fully intersectional analysis allows for a deeper understanding of compounded disadvantage and should be an aspiration for all Institutions. However, it also complicates quantitative analysis and, when working with small numbers, may result in the uncovering of individual, rather than systemic, disadvantage.

Acknowledging that many Institutions beginning on the Athena Swan journey may not have the systems in place to collect detailed demographic data, intersectionality needs to be considered in increased detail at higher Athena Swan Award levels.

⁹ Male Champions of Change (2019) [*The Panel Pledge: Gender balance in every forum*](#).

At **Bronze** level, Institutions are expected to consider an intersectional approach to:

- **identifying gaps** in data collection processes and systems
- engaging with those with diverse lived experiences
- developing a safe and inclusive Institutional environment
- supporting the attraction, retention and progression of all staff (and students, if applicable)

Where an Institution's ability to take an intersectional approach to data collection and analysis is limited, the application should acknowledge these limitations and present data as available. The application should outline planned actions to **enable future capture of this data**, including actions that aim to build a safe environment for disclosure, to build trust, and to communicate the reasons for collecting such data.

While initially it may not be possible to take an intersectional approach to quantitative data collection and analysis, actions can still be devised based on **qualitative data** and/or the **advice of external experts**. A lack of quantitative data should not preclude addressing the compounded inequities experienced by underrepresented groups.

In the **SAGE Cygnet Awards**, Institutions are expected to apply an intersectional approach to evaluating the **outcomes** and **impact** of actions implemented as part of their Athena Swan Action Plan.

At **Silver** level, Institutions are expected to demonstrate an intersectional approach to:

- **gathering, analysing, and reporting** on quantitative and qualitative data
- engaging with those with diverse lived experiences
- developing a safe and inclusive Institutional environment
- supporting the attraction, retention and progression of all staff (and if applicable, students)

To maintain individual privacy and confidentiality, data may be presented as ≤ 6 where fewer than 6 (but more than 0) people identify in a category.

HOW TO DESIGN AND CONDUCT AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Dealing with small numbers

A commonly cited issue when organisations begin to undertake intersectional data analysis is that 'the numbers are too small'. This is often the case for small organisations or departments. Even large organisations may be reluctant to disaggregate data on a broad group, since disaggregation results in small numbers within each category. Ironically, these 'small number' categories are usually underrepresented or historically excluded groups – the same groups that organisations are trying to attract, retain or progress using the findings from their intersectional analyses.

However, if organisations only analyse their data by one dimension (e.g. *gender*) instead of two (e.g. *gender* × *ethnicity*) to avoid dealing with small numbers, they risk obscuring within-group differences that are linked to the non-gender dimensions. Consequently, the interventions they choose might benefit only a subset of the target group (e.g. White women to the detriment of Women of Colour).

Clearly, an analysis based on small numbers will not reveal statistically significant results or provide a complete picture of the situation. However, it may allow inferences to be made and provide a starting point for further investigation.

Example: Exit rate of women with disability

In 2020, the Coolabah Institute had 38 women staff members who disclosed having a disability (3.5% of the total staff). By 2021, six of these women had left the organisation (~16% of the subgroup). The Coolabah Institute's attrition rate for **women overall** is around 5%, which appears low.¹⁰ However, Coolabah was conscious that if they only analyse data on the broad group (e.g. *gender* only), the higher attrition rate of **women with disability** is hidden. Thus, they made sure to **analyse their data by sub-groups** as well (e.g. *gender* × *disability*). The attrition rate of women with disability is not necessarily indicative of a retention issue at Coolabah, but the quantitative data suggest that further exploration is warranted.

Accordingly, Coolabah decided to collect qualitative data to find out why women with disability are leaving and what, if anything, can be done to retain them. They also explored the effect of these separations on the cohort who remain. Coolabah found

¹⁰ When compared to the average staff turnover rate in Australia of 8.5%. Source: Ai Group Economics and Research Team (2019), [Economics fact sheet: Labour turnover in 2019](#).

the small numbers advantageous when gathering the qualitative data since organising and facilitating the relevant interviews and focus groups was simplified.

To make the most of the opportunity to collect qualitative data, Coolabah carefully considered what information was being sought, how best to elicit that information, and how to ensure data collection was sensitive, systematic, and ethical. They also kept their approach flexible, by ensuring that their researchers were prepared to receive unexpected information and to ask relevant follow-up questions.

In some cases, an organisation's intersectional analysis might reveal only one or two people with a particular intersection. Instead of seeing these small numbers as a "dead end" for further analysis or action, the organisation should treat them as a potential **indicator of serious inequity**. The organisation could then try to understand whether the small numbers are a result of barriers to attraction (i.e. they almost never recruit any people from this group), retention (i.e. they recruit people from this group who subsequently leave) or both. This knowledge will help the organisation tailor their intervention to the specific barrier(s).

Alternatively, the organisation may have more staff with this intersection, but those individuals **chose not to disclose** their relevant identities (particularly in cases where the identity can be 'hidden'). This suggests that a culture change is needed in the organisation to create an environment where individuals feel safe to disclose these elements of their identity (see: Ways to encourage staff disclosure of demographic data).

Where very few or no people are identified through quantitative data collection, it is not feasible for institutions to undertake in-house qualitative data collection to get a representative view of the needs of these groups. In that case, organisations should **consult the literature** for good practice guidance, or **seek advice from organisations** that focus on improving workplace representation and inclusion for people from underrepresented groups.¹¹

¹¹ For example: [Reconciliation Australia](#), [Australian Network on Disability](#), [Pride in Diversity](#), [Diversity Council Australia](#).

Example: Using published research and expert consultants to inform initiatives

No staff member at Telopea Institute has identified as trans or gender diverse. The Institute realises this does not mean they have only cisgender staff, but they know that is a possibility because:

- research shows that trans applicants are less likely to be interviewed and recruited than cis applicants, even where the trans candidate is better qualified,¹²
- they have detected biases against other underrepresented groups in their recruitment practices.

Telopea intends to thoroughly revise and eliminate systematic bias from their recruitment process. The Institute forms a working group to lead this project, but is aware that it has no trans representation on the group, and no known existing pool of trans or gender diverse staff from which to seek a representative. Telopea decides to study some of the available research on good practice for recruiting trans/gender diverse employees, and to engage a consultant in trans/gender diverse recruitment to assist.¹³

Ways to encourage staff disclosure of demographic data

Data collection can be hampered by individual reluctance to disclose certain aspects of their identity, particularly aspects that are easily hidden, less socially accepted and/or carry a higher risk of discrimination. However, not having this data may result in nuances being lost, so institutions should try to maximise disclosure where they can.

Naturally, an institution **cannot, and should not, force disclosure** of identity data. Rather, it should consider how it can encourage and enable staff disclosure. Many institutions will likely benefit from making “enabling and encouraging disclosure” a specific item in their action planning.

Here are a few things an institution can do to encourage and enable disclosure.¹⁴

¹² Rainey T & Imse EE (2015) *Qualified and transgender: A report on the results of resume testing for employment discrimination based on gender identity*, District of Columbia Office of Human Rights.

¹³ For example: AWEI (2021) *AWEI practice points: Inclusion of Diverse Gender Employees & those with a Trans Experience*, Pride in Diversity – ACON.

¹⁴ For best practices in inviting disclosure of potentially sensitive identity information, including case examples, see: Moore S (2009) *Developing staff disclosure: A guide to collecting and using equality data*, Equality Challenge Unit.

Create a supportive and inclusive workplace culture where individuals feel safe to disclose

This can be developed through:

- Visible leadership championing EDI
- Inclusive line managers
- Proactive initiatives to improve EDI
- Demonstrated commitment to EDI during recruitment and induction
- EDI training for all staff
- Celebration of 'diversity days'
- Inclusion of a diversity of individuals in policy-making, and in the planning and governance of EDI initiatives
- Equity impact assessments of policies, practices and procedures

Provide practical opportunities for disclosure

Employees should be given opportunities to disclose demographic information **throughout their period of employment**, not just at the beginning. New employees may not feel comfortable disclosing sensitive information at first. Their circumstances may also change during their employment period, e.g. if they develop a disability or choose to affirm their gender. Enabling staff to disclose later, and to easily update information about themselves, may encourage disclosure.

For example, opportunities for disclosure may be provided:

- In job applications and/or interviews
- During induction
- During performance & development reviews
- In staff surveys (annual/pulse)
- At promotion (or similar)
- Through a self-service HR system (with periodic reminders)
- When requesting certain types of leave
- When requesting specific support or accommodations (parking permits, fire evacuation plans, reasonable adjustments)
- In exit interviews

Remember, these are merely *opportunities*: disclosure cannot be mandated and overwhelming staff with requests for personal information may reduce response rates. It is also useful to ensure the same information is **requested in the same way** at the various disclosure points to enable consistent data capture, analysis and comparison.

Communicate the case for disclosure

In their communication and engagement with staff, institutions must **be clear about why they are requesting disclosure** and **pre-emptively address potential concerns**. Questions are likely to arise around:

- The purpose for which the information is being requested
- How the data will be used
- When and where the data will be used/reported/published
- How the data will be stored
- How privacy and confidentiality will be protected
- Whether the data is being collected for purely statistical purposes or whether there is likely to be any follow-up

Institutions should also consider promoting the **benefits** of disclosure before data collection occurs, whether it is for ongoing disclosures or one-off collection opportunities. They could do this by explaining how the data will be acted on, and how staff will be notified of any action taken in response to the information disclosed. Institutions may also work with employee networks, unions and advocacy organisations to increase staff buy-in.

Draft appropriate disclosure questions and ensure accessibility

The way questions are framed can influence disclosure rates. The ideal questions are easy to understand, written using inclusive language and show institutional commitment to equity. Online forms and systems must also be accessible for people with disability.

The institution may have current employee networks with whom they work to ensure that questions are appropriate, and systems are accessible, or they may again need to consult with other organisations or advocacy groups.

The above principles also apply when consulting with underrepresented groups to identify or find ways to remove institutional barriers. Consultations should always be respectful and culturally appropriate, and centre the voices of underrepresented groups.

Collecting multivariate data sets

It can be difficult to collect the necessary data for an intersectional analysis. Some organisations might lack systems for collecting such data, for example because the relevant response fields (e.g. in staff induction forms) are omitted or not mandatory. While an organisation may be constrained in their ability to collect data in the short-term, they should invest in system upgrades to allow more detailed data collection and analysis. Rigorous planning is needed here to identify the data required so that omissions are not being constantly detected.

Most organisations undertake some form of Culture Survey to understand the experiences of staff and to identify barriers to attraction, retention and progression. These surveys provide

an excellent opportunity to collect demographic data on staff (see also “Ways to encourage staff disclosure of demographic data”) and to take an intersectional approach to understanding workplace experiences. However, in order to maximise the value of these surveys for intersectional analysis, they must be carefully planned in advance.

Example: Designing surveys to allow for multivariate analysis

Banksia Institute is analysing staff responses to their culture survey. One of the questions is “Have you personally been bullied or harassed at work in the last 12 months?”

The Institute knows that a person’s workplace experiences are influenced by aspects of their identity such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and language spoken at home. They want to find out if individuals from particular subgroups experience more bullying and harassment than others.

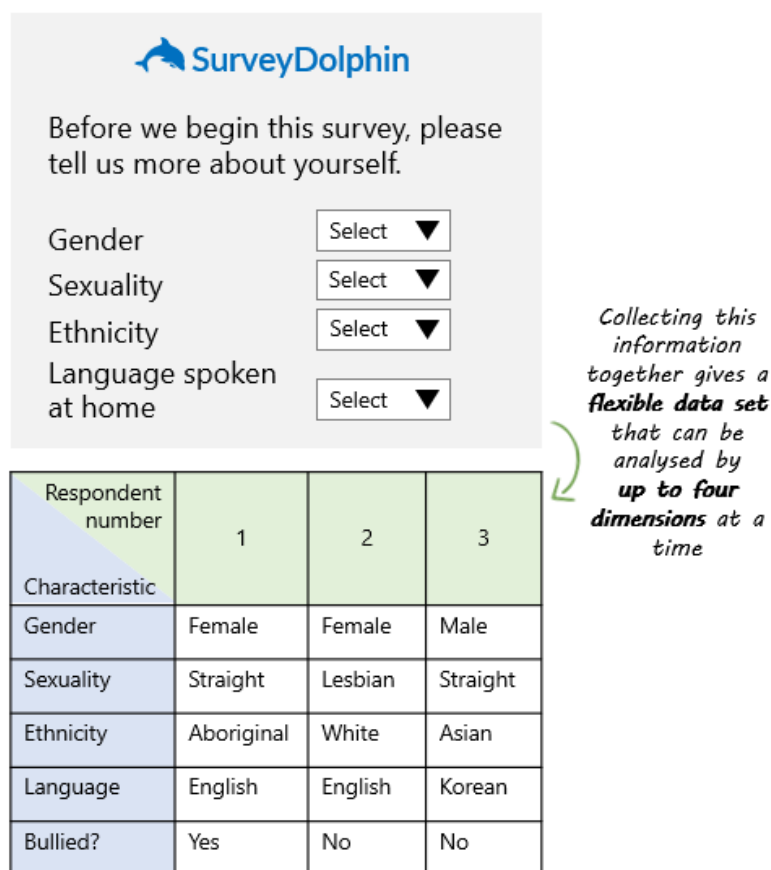


Figure 3. Extract from Banksia Institute’s culture survey and raw data.

To do this, they broke down the responses by the respondents' **A** – gender, **B** – ethnicity and **C** – sexuality.

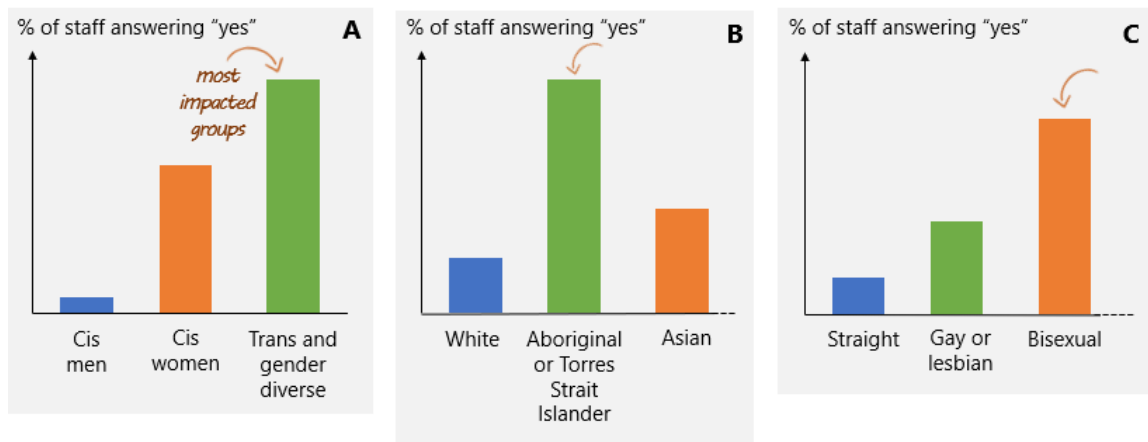


Figure 4. Example analysis by Banksia Institute.¹⁵

From their analysis, they concluded that staff who identify as trans and gender diverse, Indigenous, or bisexual, experience more bullying and harassment. However, Intersectionality tells us that the impacts of these social identities are not independent of each other, but instead intersect. Banksia's approach only considers the impact of one identity at a time and so cannot reveal compounding (or compensatory) effects that one identity might have on another.

Having realised this, the Institute revises its approach. They reprocessed their survey data to examine the impact of multiple identities at the same time (**D**).

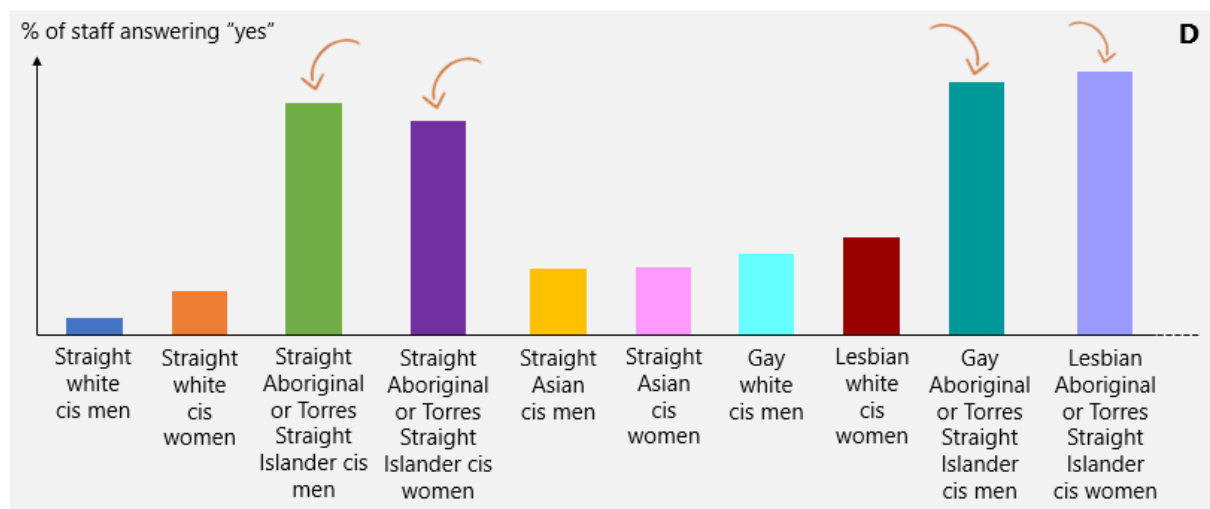


Figure 5. Example analysis by Banksia Institute.¹⁶

¹⁵ These charts are examples only, and do not represent a complete range of equity data that may be collected.

¹⁶ Due to space limits, not all combinations are shown here.

The results of the multivariate analysis reveal effects that were masked in the previous analysis. They enable the Institution to identify specific cohorts that experience the most bullying and harassment. For example, the uni-dimensional analysis may give the impression that cis women, as a whole, are far more likely to experience workplace bullying and harassment than cis men. However, the intersectional analysis makes it clear that cis women’s experiences of bullying and harassment are strongly influenced by ethnicity; fewer white and Asian women than Indigenous women have been bullied or harassed, and there is no difference between Asian men and women who identified as straight. Based on the intersectional analysis, Banksia realises that they must involve Indigenous staff (particularly those who identify as LGBT) when devising actions to address bullying and harassment.

For intersectional analysis to be possible, all the relevant demographic data must be collected in the same survey/study. Luckily for Banksia, they had invited their staff to provide these data as part of the survey.¹⁷

Compare Banksia’s approach to Acacia College’s.

*Each of these data sets can only be analysed by **one dimension** at a time, e.g. cannot disaggregate by gender AND ethnicity, or ethnicity AND sexuality – intersectional analysis not possible!*

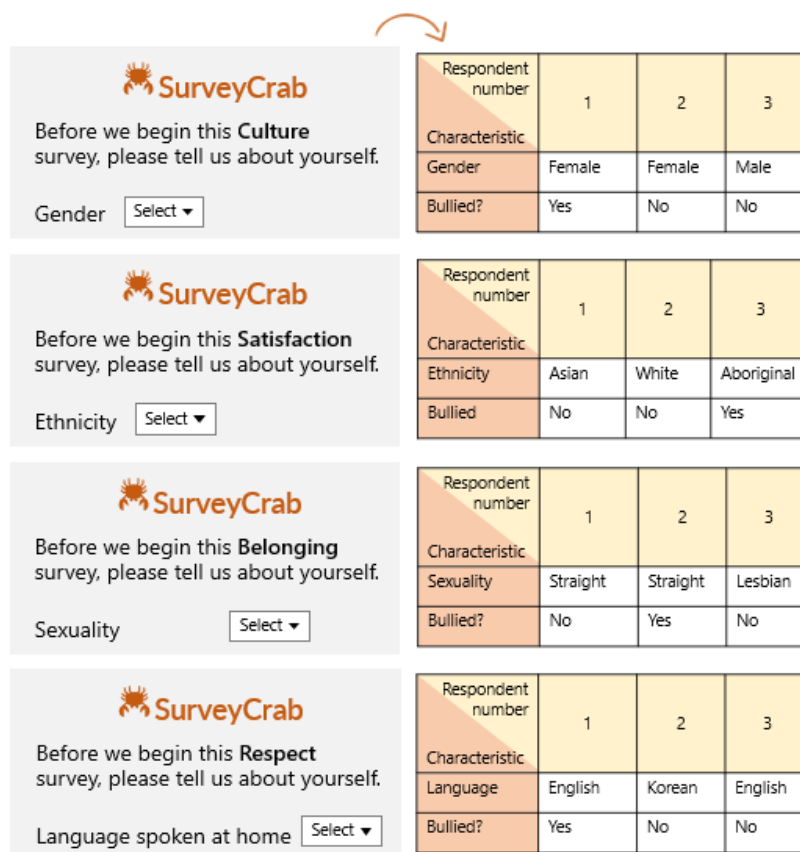


Figure 6. Extract from Acacia College’s culture survey and raw data.

¹⁷ For best practices in inviting disclosure of potentially sensitive identity information, including case examples, see the Equality Challenge Unit’s [Developing staff disclosure: A guide to collecting and using equality data](#).

Every year, Acacia evaluates their organisation's state of equity and inclusion through four pulse surveys. The combined question set in Acacia's four surveys is very similar to the questions in Banksia's survey.

However, because Acacia's Equity and Inclusion Strategy takes a siloed rather than intersectional approach, depending on the equity group Acacia is currently focusing on, each survey asks respondents to disclose just one aspect of their identity.¹⁸ Since the responses to each survey represents an independent data set, the College has no way to know (for example) whether an individual who identified as female in the Culture survey identified as white, Aboriginal or Asian in the Satisfaction survey.

In short, Institutions must plan their data collection (whether for a survey or the central HR database) so that the resulting data sets are compatible with the analysis to be performed.

Where to find existing data sets for intersectional analysis

As a result of their internal and external reporting obligations, some organisations might already be collecting data that could be used for intersectional analyses. While the following data sets will not be suitable for *every* analysis, using these may remove the need to collect new or additional data in some instances.

Higher Education Organisations

Higher Education Organisations currently report both **student** and **staff data** via the **Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS)** as part of their obligations under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA). Reporting requirements may be updated from time to time, with the Data Requirements being issued for each reporting year.

Table 1 lists the fields in the Higher Education Staff Data Collection which may be of use when undertaking an intersectional analysis of staff data.

Table 2 lists the fields in the Higher Education Student Data Collection which may be of use when undertaking an intersectional analysis of student data.

¹⁸ While this is clearly an exaggerated example, it demonstrates an important point in planning data collection.

Table 1. Fields in the Higher Education Staff Data Collection which could be of use in undertaking an intersectional analysis of staff data.^{19,20} Note that only Gender is collected in the Actual Casual (CA) File.

#	Field name	Element Name	Element Number	Data type	Mandatory Submission?	Comments
Elements submitted in the Full time and Fractional Full time (FT) File						
1	GENDER	Gender code	315	Alphanumeric	Yes	Record F/M/X ~0.01% records recorded as X
2	DATE-OF-BIRTH	Date of Birth	314	Numeric	Yes	Option to record as not provided
3	ABORIG-TORRES	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander code	316	Numeric	Yes	Option to record 'No information' ~20% of records had 'no information' ¹⁹
4	COUNTRY-BIRTH	Country of birth code	346	Numeric	Yes	Options for - born in Australia - specified overseas country of birth - unspecified overseas country of birth - no information on country of birth ~30% of records had 'no information' ¹⁹
5	LANGUAGE-HOME	Language spoken at home code	348	Numeric	Yes	Options for - English only - specified non-English language - unspecified non-English language - no information on language ~45% of records had 'no information' ¹⁹
Elements submitted in the Actual Casual (CA) File						
1	GENDER	Gender code	315	Alphanumeric	Yes	Record F/M/X ~0.01% records recorded as X

¹⁹ Mandre-Jackson S (2016) 'Data – what is available and how to overcome data gaps', pre-reading for *Intersectionality – Putting theory into practice*.

²⁰ Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2020) HEIMSHelp 2020 Reporting requirements All Higher Education Collections.

<https://heimshelp.dese.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-reporting-requirements-all-higher-education-collections.zip?v=1593759816>

Table 2. Fields in the Higher Education Student Data Collection which could be of use in undertaking an intersectional analysis of student data.²¹

#	Field name	Element Name	Element Number	Data type	Mandatory Submission?	Comments
1	GENDER	Gender code	315	Alphanumeric	Yes	Record F/M/X
2	DATE-OF-BIRTH	Date of Birth	314	Numeric	Yes	Option to record as not provided
3	ABORIG-TORRES	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander code	316	Numeric	Yes	Option to record 'No information'
4	COUNTRY-BIRTH	Country of birth code	346	Numeric	Yes	Options for - born in Australia - specified overseas country of birth - unspecified overseas country of birth - no information on country of birth
5	YEAR-ARRIVAL	Year of arrival in Australia	347	Alphanumeric	Yes	Options for - never arrived in Australia - born in Australia - specified year of arrival - no information on year of arrival - no information on whether born in Australia or not
6	LANGUAGE-HOME	Language spoken at home code	348	Numeric	Yes	Options for - English only - specified non-English language - unspecified non-English language - no information on language
7	DISABILITY	Disability	386	Numeric	Yes	Indicates the response to three questions Q1 - Options for - did not indicate the existence of a disability, impairment or long term medical condition

²¹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2020) HEIMSHelp 2020 Reporting requirements All Higher Education Collections.
<https://heimshelp.dese.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-reporting-requirements-all-higher-education-collections.zip?v=1593759816>

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - indicated the existence of a disability, impairment or long term medical condition - indicated the non-existence of a disability, impairment or long term medical condition <p>Q2 - If indicated existence in Q1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - area/s of impairment (hearing, learning, mobility, vision, medical, other) <p>Q3 – If indicated existence in Q1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - would like to receive advice on support services, equipment and facilities - does not wish to receive advice on support services, equipment and facilities
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Publicly Funded Research Agencies (PFRAs)

PFRAs vary in their mandatory reporting requirements.

Most report diversity and inclusion metrics internally, and/or in their Annual Report to the Board (which are usually made publicly available), and/or to the relevant Minister/Government. Key demographic data usually included are Gender, Indigenous status, Non-English-Speaking Background, and Disability status. For example:

Table 3. Example data collected by a Publicly Funded Research Agency which could be of use in undertaking an intersectional analysis of staff data.

Equality of Employment Opportunity for 2020

Description	Employees (full-time equivalent)	% of Total	% change 2020-2019
Female	413.4	31.06%	15.03%
Male	917.75	68.94%	5.21%
Total	1331.15	100.00%	8.07%
Workforce Diversity			
People with disabilities	5	0.38%	0.00%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	5	0.38%	0.00%
Non-English-speaking background	196	14.72%	-3.92%

Medical Research Institutes (MRIs)

MRIs do not have any mandatory reporting other than to WGEA, which only requires gender data and no other demographic characteristics.

Use models that are multiplicative rather than additive

Multivariate data analysis can reveal **interactive effects of multiple factors**, such as *gender × ethnicity*, or *gender × ethnicity × disability status*. This allows, for example, an examination not only of gender on professorial status or degree attainment, but also how the effect differs depending on ethnicity.²²

As noted previously, a fully intersectional analysis may allow for a greater depth of understanding of systemic disadvantage. However, it also makes quantitative analysis more complex. In all cases, Institutions are advised to seek the expertise of statisticians when undertaking such analyses.

²² Christoffersen A (2017) [Intersectional approaches to equality research and data](#), Equality Challenge Unit.

Here, we outline two elements to consider when undertaking an intersectional analysis.^{23,24}

To understand why this is important, let's consider the following example:

A Muslim woman in Australia will experience some disadvantage because she is a woman (sexism), and some because she is Muslim (Islamophobia). However, she will also experience some disadvantage because she is a Muslim woman that neither non-Muslim women nor Muslim men experience. This means that her lived experience of her gender and her religion are **not additive**. She does not experience them purely as individual characteristics; rather, they interact in a **multiplicative** manner.

Lived experience = gender × religion

By extension, if the Muslim woman chooses to wear a head covering:

Lived experience = gender × religion × 'visibility'

Her experience will be different to that of a Muslim woman who chooses not to wear a head covering, but also different to that of a non-Muslim woman who covers her head.



An additive model, such as *lived experience = gender + religion + 'visibility'*, allows us to study the effect of **one** variable while the others are held constant. However, it does not consider the effect of **all** variables changing **simultaneously**.

To understand that, we need to use multiplication: *lived experience = gender × religion × 'visibility'*. The multiplication more accurately estimates the simultaneous and compounding effects of the different variables, and thus allows an understanding of the differential experiences resulting from each unique combination of variables.

Consider both individual and structural data points

When undertaking intersectional data analysis, focusing on data related to individuals while ignoring the larger systems and cultures that they exist in could produce flawed insights.

²³ Rouhani S (2014) *Intersectionality-informed quantitative research: A primer*, Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy, SFU.

²⁴ Krause H (2019) *How to model data with intersectionality*, We All Count website, accessed 16 February 2021.

Context should be included where possible to better understand the **interaction of identity and environment**.

For example, the experience of an Aboriginal staff member working in a university's Indigenous Research Unit may be very different to the experience they may have in a faculty. Similarly, an LGBTIQ+ staff member working in a Research Institute with a visible, active and well-established Ally network may have a different experience to the one they would have had in a less inclusive environment.

Including such structural data points **shifts our thinking away from a deficit model** or 'fixing the [underrepresented group]' approach. It also leads to a better understanding of how organisational structures, systems and culture act as barriers to attraction, retention and progression, and how changes to these can improve GEDI in the organisation.

To incorporate both individual and structural variables, **multilevel models** can be constructed. As above, such models include multiplication, not just addition. Again, Institutions are advised to consult those with statistical expertise, and to make use of the guidance and statistical packages available when undertaking intersectional data analysis.

A note of caution: When institutions conduct quantitative intersectional analysis, they often measure the experience of underrepresented minorities **relative** to that of the majority/dominant group. This inadvertently positions the experiences of the majority as the 'norm', which in turn perpetuates the 'othering' of minority groups.²⁵

HOW TO DESIGN INTERSECTIONAL ACTIONS

If Intersectionality is not considered during action planning, underrepresentation of particular groups may persist even after countermeasures are put in place. Organisations should set themselves up for success by applying an intersectional lens to all equity initiatives from the start.

Example: Intersectionality in website image diversity

As part of its Gender Action Plan, Hakea University revises the images on its website to achieve gender balance. Quandong University implements a similar action; however, it consciously considers visible intersections in its image selection, resulting in a much more diverse representation of people on its website. The Diversity & Inclusion team at Quandong are unlikely to request a revision of the website in 12 months' time when they refresh their Cultural Inclusion Action Plan; Hakea University is much more likely to do so.

²⁵ Bailey J, Steeves V, Burkell J, Shade LR, Ruparelia R and Regan P (2019) '[Getting at equality: Research methods informed by the lessons of intersectionality](#)', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18:1–13.

Taking an intersectional approach to designing actions and initiatives requires organisations to consider the experiences, perspectives and needs of a diversity of people.

To develop effective GEDI initiatives, organisations must adopt a **bottom-up approach** that involves all stakeholders, particularly those who are the most disadvantaged by current structures, systems and culture. Relying on a top-down approach where actions are planned solely by senior leaders (who are often not a very diverse group) is likely to result in equity for some, but not all, people of a particular gender.

One way to ensure diverse perspectives are included in the action planning process is to ensure the **involvement of, and engagement with a broad cross-section of people**. Ensuring representation of people from underrepresented groups on project teams – ideally in leadership and decision-making roles – is essential, though organisations must be mindful of tokenism, othering, and overburdening. It is also important to avoid interpreting the experiences of one individual as representative of the experiences of a whole group – the concept of Intersectionality shows us that everyone’s experience is different.

Genuinely co-designed actions to remove/reduce barriers are more likely to:

- work at a systemic level
- stop the perpetuation of deficit models through responses targeted at the individual level
- be successfully implemented due to reduced resistance and backlash and greater championing of change²⁶
- have positive impact and fewer unintended negative consequences, since a diverse group will have assessed potential impact (formally or informally) in the development phase.

To gain broad input, experience and expertise, and avoid tokenism and burden, it may be useful to connect with specialist external organisations and/or the institution’s employee networks (where these exist). In fact, if such networks do not exist, it may be worth exploring their establishment. Some organisations may have informal versions of these groups that provide peer support and allyship. However, formalised and well-resourced employee networks have stronger potential to **advocate** for their members, **educate** the broader institution community and **act** as agents for change to create more inclusive environments.²⁷ Naturally, these groups must in themselves be intersectional and not siloed.

There are countless ways of applying an intersectional lens to action planning. The following are examples only.

²⁶ Flood M, Dragiewicz M and Pease B (2018) *Resistance and backlash to gender equality: An evidence review*, Crime and Justice Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology.

²⁷ For an example of how employee resource groups can be used as a mechanism to promote disability inclusion, see: Gould R, Harris SP, Mullin C and Jones R (2020) ‘*Disability, diversity, and corporate social responsibility: Learning from recognized leaders in inclusion*’, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 52(1):29–42.

Example: Intersectional actions for recruiting gender diverse people

As part of their efforts to increase the number, and diversity, of women, trans and gender diverse people recruited, Casuarina Institute implements a number of initiatives including:

- Including an explicit diversity statement in the job advertisement
- Ensuring all application forms and supporting material are available in accessible formats, and making all diversity policy/strategies available to applicants
- Asking all applicants proceeding to interview whether they require any adjustments or assistance to participate in the interview
- Interviewing any suitably qualified person who identified as trans or gender diverse during the application process
- Co-operating with other small institutions to achieve diversity on recruitment panels, and including EDI considerations in mandatory training for all panel members
- Excluding from recruitment panels anyone accused of inappropriate behaviour (e.g. discrimination, bullying, harassment)
- Publicly opposing 'exclusionary science'
- Implementing diversity guidelines, encompassing all forms of diversity, for the institution's communications and media team
- Ensuring the Institute's website is accessible
- Providing visible indicators of inclusion in interview rooms/waiting areas

Example: Intersectional improvements to leave entitlements

Currong University conducts a review of their leave policies and provisions. Following widespread consultation with staff members, they decide to:

- Include a provision for additional medical leave for trans and intersex staff, as well as for staff of any gender undergoing fertility treatment
 - Broaden the definition of 'family' for carers and compassionate leave to encompass cultural definitions of family, as well as chosen family
 - Make their definitions for parental leave more inclusive, with explicit incorporation of surrogacy
 - Extend the return to work supports and provisions to anyone returning from any kind of extended leave (e.g. due to ill health)
 - Allow staff to donate personal leave to colleagues who have exhausted their own leave allocation
-

Example: Considering intersectionality in the selection of an external service provider

Coranderrk University is reviewing its Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider as part of its work on preventing and responding to bullying, harassment and discrimination. It hopes to use the EAP as a mechanism to collect intersectional data on the incidence of bullying, harassment and discrimination in cases where these are not formally reported, in addition to the EAP's role in supporting those who have experienced such behaviour.

Through its self-assessment, Coranderrk learns that:

- Few employees have used the EAP. Awareness of the service is high, but people are choosing not to use it. The main reason is a lack of confidence in the provider's ability to understand and assist.
- There are no male:female differences in employee confidence in the EAP, but trans and gender diverse staff have low levels of confidence in the provider.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff of all genders have very low levels of confidence in the provider.
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) staff have as much confidence in the provider as straight staff. However, GLB staff from religious minority groups have extremely low levels of confidence.

Coranderrk determines that:

- The selected EAP provider must be willing to collect and provide the institution with disaggregated, anonymised demographic data on who is using the service, and particularly on cases relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- The provider must have counsellors with diverse identities and lived experiences who are trained to provide relevant and responsive services.
- The provider's promotional materials must be inclusive.
- The EAP must be able to apply a trauma-informed approach when dealing with bullying, harassment and discrimination.

When investigating providers, Coranderrk identifies that none have sufficient diversity of counsellors to meet the identified needs. It decides to offer employees a choice of Employee Assistance Programs, and provides comparative information to help staff select the most appropriate one for their needs. It also establishes an advisory group to liaise with the EAPs to ensure needs are met and data collected. The group also assists in promoting and minimising stigma about using the EAP.

In all of these cases, approaching the design of actions with an intersectional lens increases the chance of genuinely increasing GEDI in the organisation.

SUMMARY

- The concept of Intersectionality was introduced in the late 80s by Kimberlé Crenshaw.
- It recognises that a person's identity is shaped by a range of internal, external and contextual factors that intersect to constitute an individual with unique lived experience and, as a result, unique thinking, knowledge, skills, and networks.
- Today, Intersectionality is often used to describe how various aspects of a person's identity interact to compound and amplify inequity and disadvantage.
- An intersectional approach is not at odds with a focus on gender equity. Rather, it ensures that initiatives to attract, retain and progress more women (or other genders), do not only assist a subset of women, typically those already most advantaged.
- In the SAGE Athena Swan framework, an intersectional approach to the self-assessment and action planning process is essential to gain a nuanced understanding of the:
 - ❖ gender inequities that exist in the Institution
 - ❖ barriers to attraction, retention and progression encountered by particular groups
 - ❖ impact of actions implemented
 - ❖ challenges to building an environment that is safe and inclusive for all.
- Recognising Athena Swan's focus on gender, Institutions are expected to address, at minimum, the intersections of gender and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background; gender and cultural background; gender and disability status; and gender and sexuality. Institutions may also choose to demonstrate their consideration of other characteristics that intersect with gender, or to undertake a fully intersectional analysis.
- SAGE acknowledges that many Institutions may experience challenges to undertaking an intersectional quantitative data analysis. The application should present data as available, acknowledge limitations, and outline plans to enable future capture of this data. A lack of quantitative data should not preclude addressing the compounded inequities experienced by underrepresented groups as actions can be devised based on qualitative data, good practice from the available literature, and/or the advice of external experts.
- While low numbers can make an intersectional analysis difficult, failing to disaggregate can hide within-group differences, and the resulting interventions may benefit only a subset of the target group. An analysis based on small numbers will not reveal statistically significant results, nor provide a

complete picture of the situation, but may allow inferences to be made and provide a starting point for further investigation. Uncovering very small numbers may, in itself, signal a need for intervention.

- To allow for intersectional analysis of quantitative data, institutions may need to upgrade systems to allow more detailed data collection, and thus analysis. Work may also be needed to encourage and enable staff disclosure of identity characteristics.
- Culture Surveys provide an excellent opportunity to collect demographic data and to understand the experiences of staff. To maximise the value of these surveys for intersectional analysis, they must be carefully planned.
- Undertaking an intersectional analysis of workforce data is complex and Institutions are advised to seek the expertise of statisticians in doing so.
- Actions are more likely to be implemented successfully and have positive impact when organisations:
 - Conduct meaningful, culturally appropriate, consultation that centres the voices of underrepresented groups
 - Ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the action planning process
 - Genuinely co-design actions to remove/reduce barriers to attraction, retention and progression