Introduction and Overview

This document is designed to help councils conduct a gender impact assessment (GIA) on the development of the Council Plan and other key strategic plans. It outlines key capabilities and considerations to ensure Council decision-making is gender equitable and inclusive.

Legislative context

Two key pieces of legislation in Victoria guide this work:

Local Government Act 2020, which:

- mandates that councils prepare and adopt a Council Plan following each general election
- outlines required principles and key inclusions to guide plan development

Gender Equality Act 2020, which:

- mandates that GIAs are conducted on policies, programs and services, with a direct and significant impact on the community
- this includes Council Plans and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans (MPHWP)

Together, these laws ensure councils embed gender equity and *actively consider* the needs of all municipal community members. This means no one is left behind.

Why a GIA?

A GIA is a valuable tool for evaluating how policies, programs, and services affect people of different genders. In the context of a Council Plan (including those integrated with MPHWPs), going through the GIA process helps to:

- Understand how gender and other attributes shape your communities' experiences and needs;
- Identify trends and differences using gender-disaggregated data and deliberative engagement with women, men, and gender-diverse community members;
- Document practical actions to address gendered barriers and promote gender equality.

A successful GIA will inform the overall direction and key elements of a Council Plan. It will ensure gender considerations:

- Are embedded in strategic decision-making
- Shape priorities and programming.

Councils are required to report every two years on the GIAs they complete. This includes information on actions taken to meet the needs of people of different genders. Councils should also report on how they applied an intersectional lens while completing the assessment.

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Where to start

Whether your Council is aiming for foundational compliance or striving for transformative gender equality outcomes, this guidance note will help you navigate the GIA process effectively to achieve meaningful change in your community.

Stage 1: Preparation and planning

When integrating a GIA into the development of a Council Plan (or other key strategic plans), it is important to <u>define your approach</u> early. This ensures that the process is strategic, efficient, and aligned with council priorities.

Below are four key considerations. These can help councils determine the most effective approach for completing a GIA on the development of the Council Plan.

1.1 Set your intentions and objectives

Start by clarifying your GIA goals for this Council Plan cycle. Are you aiming to:

- <u>Meet foundational compliance</u>: Fulfil legislative requirements with some level of stakeholder engagement; or

- <u>Build gender-responsive practices</u>: Move beyond compliance by actively considering gender equity across key areas of Council Plan development. This could include data collection, community engagement, defining priorities, and resource allocation; or

- <u>Pursue transformative outcomes</u>: Embed gender equity and inclusion across all decision-making at a deeper level.

A **foundational approach** aims to meet requirements and build knowledge. It may have a GIA Lead conduct the assessment to inform Council Plan development. Key stakeholders such as the Executive and Councillors would be engaged in a targeted way. The exact approach depends on the level of resources available. It may focus on documenting insights on gender differences from a municipal scan and community engagement. Alternatively, it may involve conducting a GIA on a distinct piece of work. Gender considerations may not be fully embedded throughout the planning process.

A **gender-responsive approach** goes beyond compliance. It embeds gender equity considerations into key areas of Council Plan development but does not yet commit to full-scale transformation. This involves integrating gender-disaggregated data, ensuring equitable community engagement, and applying a gender lens to programming. This level of commitment focuses on building internal capability, increasing awareness, and laying the groundwork for more comprehensive gender equity integration in future planning cycles.

A **transformative approach** drives meaningful, long-term change in the council and the community. This involves educating councillors, executives, and staff involved in policy and strategy development. They understand gender equity, its structural drivers, and how policies and decisions shape different experiences. It also requires the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data, including by independent consultants. This ensures transparency and validation and makes the varied experiences of community members visible. Most importantly, a transformative approach embeds gender equity principles across all stages so it influences engagement, programming and

budgeting. There is a strong focus on ensuring the participation of women, gender-diverse people, and priority groups. This means their voices and lived experience help shape Council priorities and outcomes.

Councils may be at different stages in this journey, and your approach should reflect your current capability, capacity and resources.

1.2 Determine the GIA scope

A four-year Council Plan is part of a larger integrated strategic planning and reporting framework that includes several legislated elements. These include the longer-term Community Vision, and various short- and long-term plans for managing resources, including an Asset Plan, Financial Plan, Revenue and Rating Plan, Annual Budget and Workforce Plan. Determining your GIA scope within this complex planning environment is essential.

Decide whether your GIA will cover *all* aspects of the Council Plan or focus on *specific* areas. If this is your first GIA on a Council Plan, you may choose to pilot a targeted approach, with the aim of expanding in future planning cycles.

A **targeted approach** may focus on:

- Community Vision: Ensuring the vision reflects diverse community needs.
- Community Engagement Process: Improving how consultation activities capture gendered perspectives.
- Strategic Priorities/Pillars: Embedding gender equity in Council's key focus areas.
- Budget and Action Plan Consultation: Ensuring funding decisions support gender-responsive planning.
- MPHWP Health and Wellbeing Priorities (*for Councils integrating the MPHWP into the Council Plan*): understanding gendered differences across health and wellbeing priorities.

For Councils ready to take a more **comprehensive approach,** a full-scale GIA can be applied across multiple stages. This could be from defining the Community Vision through various stages of data collection and deliberative community engagement, to finalising and promoting the Plan. This ensures gender equity is systematically embedded throughout the entire Council Plan development process.

Note that for Councils integrating the MPHWP into the Council Plan, a **comprehensive approach** may include two standalone GIAs–one on the Council Plan and another on the MPWHP–or a single comprehensive GIA on the development of an Integrated Council Plan. Two standalone GIAs may be of benefit if

- multiple teams are leading each component
- data collection processes and timelines vary, or
- the decision to integrate has been determined at a later stage or for the first time.

1.3 Understand your timelines

To ensure gender equity is embedded effectively, map out key Council Plan milestones and identify the best points to apply a gender lens.

Ideally, GIA requirements should be incorporated from the start, during the planning and scoping phase. Early integration prevents missed opportunities and ensures gender equity considerations shape the Plan rather than being added as a last-minute compliance task.

A common challenge in many councils is misalignment between teams, such as:

- Gender Equity Leads may not be fully aware of Council Plan timelines;
- Governance teams may have limited experience applying GIA requirements;
- Councillors may be unaware of the legislation and their responsibilities.

To avoid disconnects, foster early collaboration between Executive teams, Governance, and GIA Leads (plus Social Planners, Health and Wellbeing Teams for those councils completing Integrated Council Plans). Open communication across these groups will ensure gender considerations are embedded at the right points in the process.

1.4 Prepare your stakeholders

Once decisions on the size, scope, and timelines for your GIA have been made, it's time to engage key stakeholders and clarify who needs to be involved and what they need to know. Map out:

- Who leads the process (e.g. Project Lead, CEO, Executive team);
- Who needs to be engaged (e.g. Councillors, community groups, consultants);
- What are the relevant approval processes and decision-making timelines?
- How gender considerations will be embedded (e.g. through training, briefings, data collection);
- What gaps in skills or knowledge are there?

By ensuring all stakeholders understand their role, councils can build internal capability for long-term gender-responsive planning. For more insight into the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, please refer to **Appendix 1: Stakeholder Engagement - GIAs and Council Plans.**

Stage 2: Successfully conducting a GIA

In addition to the support and buy-in of leadership, we have identified **four core capabilities** that are essential for the success of conducting a GIA on your Council Plan, MPHWP, or any other key council strategic plans and policies.

Prioritising these capabilities helps to ensure that gender equity is embedded effectively and consistently throughout Council strategic planning and policy development processes.

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2.1 Core Capability: Gender Equitable & Inclusive Community Engagement

Ensuring diverse voices are meaningfully included in consultations and decision-making.

The *Local Government Act 2020* places a strong emphasis on **deliberative engagement.** This means councils need to involve the community in shaping key strategies, including the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, Asset Plan, or MPHWPs.

To ensure community engagement is inclusive and reflective of diverse experiences, those leading deliberative engagement or other consultation should be able to demonstrate *how* they have considered the needs of all genders at every stage. To embed gender equity into community consultation processes so that more voices are heard, you should:

- <u>Engage diverse facilitators</u>: Actively seek individuals of different genders and backgrounds as presenters, speakers, and facilitators.

- <u>Identify gaps in representation</u>: Regularly assess who is (and is *not*) represented in consultation processes and why. Consider approaches for specific groups, such as women-only focus groups. Include women from wider backgrounds such as First Nations women, culturally diverse women, women with disabilities, and older women.

- <u>Address accessibility</u>: Inquire about participants' access and support needs in advance. Choose safe, accessible venues. Remove barriers to participation by providing interpreters, all-gender toilets, and child-friendly spaces.

- <u>Offer varied engagement options</u>: Provide multiple methods for feedback, both in-person and online. Consider power dynamics in the consultation process. For example, you might target priority groups through initiatives like a '<u>gender walk</u>', and outreach to specific community groups and advisory committees.

- <u>Adopt an iterative approach</u>: Be open to participant feedback and refine community engagement strategies based on their input. If some voices are missing, update your plan to close these gaps.

- <u>Communicate outcomes clearly</u>: Show how community input from women, men and gender diverse community members across different priority groups has shaped the final plan.

2.2 Core Capability: Gender-disaggregated Data Collection

Using gendered data insights to inform policies, programs, and services.

Gender-disaggregated data is information broken down or separated by gender to reveal *trends and differences* in experiences, behaviours, and outcomes. This type of data often highlights disparities in:

- access to resources
- participation rates
- priorities
- policy impacts.

Data broken down in this way helps us understand the unique needs and experiences of women, men and gender diverse community members. It is essential for a successful GIA and for guiding more inclusive and effective decision-making.

Consider the following example from a community survey:

- Non-disaggregated statistic: 80% of survey respondents agree that roads are the number one priority for the municipality.
- Gender-disaggregated statistic: 96% of men, 64% of women and 35% of gender diverse respondents agree that roads are the number one priority for the municipality.

This example illustrates that women and gender-diverse community members may have different priorities compared to men. When we further disaggregate data by gender and other attributes (e.g. gender *and* age, or gender *and* disability), we start to get an even clearer indication of community priorities. This is called taking an 'intersectional approach'.

- Intersectional statistic: 75% of men with a disability and 45% of women with a disability agree that roads are the number one priority for the municipality. There was not adequate data to understand the needs of gender diverse people with a disability.

A GIA should serve as a foundational element in shaping both programming and priorities within the Council Plan. Collecting gender-disaggregated data is essential to support this. This includes the collation of data in your municipal scan and the review of information shared through community engagement. Consider some of the following approaches to ensure this happens:

- Provide clear briefs to consultants: If you are engaging consultants to collect data, conduct data analysis or lead community engagement processes, make sure they understand the requirement to incorporate gender-disaggregated and intersectional data.

- Utilise existing data: Access readily available gender-disaggregated data sources such as ABS Census Data, profile.id, Victorian Women's Health Atlas, and other GIA-related resources collated by CGEPS.

- Ensure demographic questions in surveys: Include specific demographic questions in all surveys. Provide explanations for why they are included and what the data will be used for. You can review the Victorian Public Sector's data collection statement for ideas on language to use.

- Disaggregate *all* data, where possible: Analyse and report all findings by gender and other relevant attributes (e.g. age and disability). Prioritise lived experiences by integrating firsthand insights with policy analysis and demographic data.

If you are integrating the MPHWP into your Council Plan:

- Integrate gender-disaggregated data in your municipal scan for your MPHWP under each health and wellbeing area, including the prevention of all forms of violence.

- Ensure Recommendation 94 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence is addressed.

2.3 Core Capability: Gender Equitable & Inclusive Communications

Ensuring language, visuals, and messaging reflect and reinforce equity and inclusion.

Effective communication is a powerful tool for advancing gender equity. The way information is presented through language, imagery, and messaging shapes perceptions, influences engagement, and determines whether people feel included and valued.

When developing your Council Plan, MPHWP, or other major strategies, it's essential to ensure that all communications are clear, inclusive, and free from gender bias. This applies to everything from written reports and public statements to consultation materials and visual representation.

Councils can challenge stereotypes by avoiding language or imagery that reinforces harmful traditional gender roles. Inclusive communication encourages participation and ensures priority groups feel valued and heard.

The following strategies support your council to create gender-inclusive communications throughout the planning process:

- Use gender-inclusive language: Avoid gender-specific terms (e.g. policeman, lollipop lady). Recognise and include the broad spectrum of gender identities beyond the binary (referencing women, men and gender diverse community members).

- Challenge gender stereotypes in imagery: Use visuals that reflect diversity and inclusion. Showcase people in non-traditional roles (e.g. men in caregiving), LGBTIQA+ and culturally diverse families, and people of all ages and abilities. Ensure women, gender-diverse individuals, people with disabilities, First Nations people, people of all ages, and diverse cultural groups are represented.

- Highlight gender equity in leadership communications: Messaging from the Mayor and CEO should reinforce Council's commitment to inclusivity, equity and community wellbeing. Communications can:
  - celebrate the diversity of the municipality
  - reference Council's obligations under the *Gender Equality Act*
  - emphasise gender equity in the workforce and community.
  - include a commitment to preventing violence against women.

For further reading, City of Melbourne's Gender Equality in Advertising guidelines and Melbourne Water's Guide to Inclusive Communications and Engagement provide useful tips and examples.

2.4 Core Capability: Equity-focused Budgeting and Resource Distribution

Allocating resources in a way that actively promotes gender equity and inclusivity.

Integrating equity-focused budgeting principles in financial planning, resource allocation and programming is a critical component of ensuring equitable outcomes for all genders and priority groups. This approach addresses existing disparities and also actively works to dismantle them. This could look like:

- Transparent and inclusive consultation: Create opportunities for diverse individuals to contribute to budget priorities, particularly priority groups historically underrepresented in decision-making.

- Clarify responsibilities and ensure adequate resources: Ensure gender equity capacity-building is effectively resourced and clearly outlined in position descriptions for specialised roles and leaders responsible for overseeing implementation, budget preparation and financial planning processes.

- Addressing bias in budgeting: Resource allocation decisions have traditionally been influenced by default assumptions and stereotypes. To ensure equitable distribution of resources, consider how funding decisions are made and how they impact people differently based on gender and other attributes. Instead, prioritise community-led initiatives that actively address gender inequities and promote social inclusion. Be mindful of where voluntary work or unpaid contributions might exacerbate existing inequities.

- Aligning programming resources with equity goals: A GIA should shape programming and priorities within the Council Plan. Make clear to the community how resource allocation addresses intersectional factors such as age, disability, cultural background, socioeconomic status and geographic location.

- Auditing and accountability: Establish clear performance indicators for tracking how council's budget allocations affect people of different genders and support gender equity goals. Require budget submissions to explicitly address the gender impacts of proposed initiatives.

Stage 3: Embedding and sustaining impact

To ensure that gender equity commitments translate into real-world outcomes, councils need to track progress and refine their approach to embedding an intersectional gender lens over time. This involves monitoring progress, measuring impact, and integrating gender equity into future planning cycles to drive long-term, systemic change.

- Monitoring and evaluation: Track and measure the effectiveness of your actions by consistently reporting against the performance indicators and accountability measures you have set. Use feedback loops (e.g. community engagement, stakeholder reviews) to improve future GIAs.

- Reporting: Under the *Gender Equality Act 2020,* councils must report every two years on the progress they have made in progressing gender equality in the workplace and the community. Progress reports, including detail on GIAs, must be published on the council's website. This transparency with the municipal community and other stakeholders is critical for building accountability and trust.

- Future planning: Aim to move from a one-off GIA to ongoing integration of a gender lens across all policies and programs. Continue to build internal capabilities (e.g. training, leadership buy-in, integration into standard operating procedures).

Appendix 1: Stakeholder Engagement - GIAs and Council Plans

GIA Stakeholder	Reason for Engaging	Information Required to support GIA process
Councillors	Councillors contribute to strategic planning by representing community interests, setting priorities, making collective decisions as the Council, and overseeing implementation. Councils are accountable for GIA reporting as a component of reporting under Gender Equality Act	Consider councillor briefings covering: ● Foundational concepts of Intersectional Gender Equity and key legislation. ● The significance of Gender Impact Assessments and resistance management strategies. ● Workplace Gender Equality through Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAPs). ● Guidelines for fostering Gender Equitable and Inclusive Behaviour, addressing the Council Chamber, Sexual Harassment, and the roles of Bystanders and Allies. Provide councillors with a briefing pack that includes: ● Gender-disaggregated data highlighting priorities for advancing gender equality, including intersectional data. ● Legislative requirements related to GIAs (and other reporting obligations). ● A FAQ document on induction topics and links to additional resources. ● An overview of how intersectional gender equality and GIAs have shaped current Council programs and policies, along with insights on the upcoming draft Council Plan.
Executive Management Team	The Council CEO is responsible for implementing the Council Plan, overseeing operations, managing resources, and ensuring the Plan's strategic alignment and compliance with legislative requirements and other statutory frameworks. Senior leaders will influence the Council Plan process - as key decision-makers at various stages Senior leaders champion gender equity	Provide education and resources through tailored sessions on: ● Foundational concepts of Intersectional Gender Equity and key legislation. ● The benefits of GIAs including case studies and local gender-disaggregated data ● The role of leaders in supporting teams to meet legislative requirements and to advocate for transformative change Clearly articulate (and support) the role of leaders to: ● Ensure Council meets their legislated obligations and their teams have the required information, resources and capabilities to complete GIAs. ● Oversee the GIA process by integrating it early in the planning phase of Council and MPHW Plans, assigning ownership across departments, and tracking progress. ● Embed gender equality into Council's strategic vision, policies, and decision-making by assessing policies through a gender lens and making gender equality a core value. ● Address gendered challenges in service delivery, such as urban planning and

		community safety, and target gender-specific opportunities, like supporting women in leadership ● Encourage support for gender-responsive budgeting by using gender-disaggregated data in resource allocation and ensuring priority groups are adequately supported. ● Champion Council's commitment to gender equality and ensure progress is communicated internally and externally.
Strategy and Planning Working Group / Integrated Project Planning Group	These teams are key decision makers in the development of the Council Plan/Integrated Council Plan This may include officers across Council such as social planners, governance, community engagement, communications, and diversity and inclusion specialists.	Run a GIA briefing session with your working group at the commencement of planning to communicate: ● Council's obligation to complete a GIA and the agreed scope/process ● Council's commitment to progressing gender equality in the workplace and community ● The benefits of this work ● Their roles and responsibility to embed GIA processes and/or an intersectional gender lens across all planning and design phases that they are leading or involved in ● How they can champion this work as advocates for gender equality as the Council Plan progresses (gender should be considered at all stages and this requires a team effort)
Consultants	To ensure their contribution aligns with Council's commitment to intersectional gender equality and aligns with GIA requirement to identify trends and differences through gender-disaggregated data.	In consultant's briefs, include the following (depending on scope of work): ● A paragraph outlining the Council's commitment to intersectional gender equality, referencing the Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) and the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic). ● An expectation to collect data that can be disaggregated by gender and other attributes. ● An expectation to review and analysing information through an intersectional gender lens to identify varying experiences, needs and barriers of people of different genders and diverse lived experiences. ● An expectation that any reports provided to the Council include gender-disaggregated data. ● A commitment to using inclusive imagery that does not reinforce harmful gender stereotypes or perpetuate biases based on age, race, culture, religion, disability, and sexuality. When selecting potential consultants, consider how they have demonstrated or plan to demonstrate their commitment to intersectional gender equality as part of the assessment criteria.
Community Members	To give effect to the community engagement principles in the council's Community Engagement Policy	● Provide opportunities to upskill community gender equality concepts, as well as Councils obligations and commitments. ● Share information on the GIA process and ways to contribute.

	and facilitate meaningful deliberative engagement that considers diverse community views. To gather a broad range of feedback from women, men and gender diverse community members. To foster a stronger relationship and build trust between the community and Council.	● Outline reasons for collecting gender and other demographic data as part of community surveys or community engagement processes ● Outline clear expectations for engagement, participation, and anticipated outcomes from the GIA process.