

COMMISSIONER FOR PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT GUIDELINE: WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Public Sector Act 2009

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INTRODUCTION

This Guideline is intended to inform and assist in achieving and maintaining a 50% representation of women in executive roles in the South Australian public sector.

The Commissioner for Public Sector Employment is empowered to issue guidelines relating to public sector employment matters pursuant to section 14(d) of the *Public Sector Act 2009* ("the PS Act").

This Guideline is written with the following objects of the Act in mind:

- to encourage public sector agencies and employees to apply a public sector-wide perspective in the performance of functions;
- to facilitate the integration of employment and management practices across *the public sector*;
- to promote uniformity and transparency in governance arrangements for the public sector; and
- to provide the framework for the State's Public Service and the effective and fair employment and management of Public Service and other public sector employees.

SCOPE

This Guideline is intended to assist in the achievement of the South Australian Strategic Plan Target 6.23: *have women comprising half of the public sector employees in the executive levels (including chief executives) by 2014.*

Women continue to be under-represented in executive roles, including as chief executives, in the South Australian public sector. In contrast, women are over-represented in administrative roles at lower classification levels. The inequity of this situation has been recognised in Target 6.23 of the State's Strategic Plan.

The South Australian public sector accounts for just over 12% of employment in South Australia. Its employment practices and profile can have a substantial and direct impact on employment opportunities, particularly for under-represented classes or categories of people. A workforce that is properly representative of both genders is likely to increase the capacity of the public sector to be innovative and flexible, and to be truly responsive to the needs of the community.

There is clear evidence supporting an increase in the number of women in executive roles. When women are equitably represented in leadership roles, there are greater returns on invested capital; equity and sales; and an enhanced emphasis on values, ethics, building relationships, direction, control, leadership, external orientation, accountability and innovation. Women bring significant value to leadership roles both through bottom line results and organisational culture.

RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT

Recruiting from within: ensuring there are women ready to take up executive roles

Training and development opportunities appropriate to the role and functions undertaken by executives should be provided to employees in the two classification levels immediately below executive level, to assist in ensuring that there are women who have the competencies to readily assume executive roles.

Consistent with section 8 of the PS Act, agencies are to establish performance management and development systems that, *inter alia*:

- identify high achievers;
- assist individuals to become aware of their own potential;
- facilitate discussions on career planning; and
- provide a focussed approach to professional development.

Training and development opportunities for existing executives and aspiring executives should be provided equally, in both quality and quantity, to persons of both genders. The South Australian Executive Service (“SAES”) has established an executive competency framework. This framework provides a set of robust behavioural competencies, which can be applied consistently to recruitment and selection criteria, performance assessments, and for the identification of employee development needs across the public sector.

Development programs that are specifically tailored for women may encourage and support women in their aspirations to attain executive level roles, particularly when the context in which they work is male-dominated. Programs that provide a whole-of-Government perspective, as opposed to those tailor made to individual agencies, should constitute a significant proportion of development opportunities offered. This will assist women to identify a broader range of career opportunities in the public sector at the same time as facilitating mobility and the development of across-Government networks.

Recruitment

Attention to the details of the process and method of recruiting people to work in the public sector is critical in creating interest at the outset. Following are recruitment and employment strategies that will assist in attracting women to executive public sector roles:

- a. Non-discriminatory role descriptions, job advertisements and employment conditions.
 - i. Describe the essential components of the role and avoid raising issues that are not essential to the role and/or that could deter women from applying for a vacancy (e.g. the statement ‘some interstate travel maybe required’ when in reality it will not).
 - ii. Avoid jargon in advertisements.
 - iii. Avoid gender stereotypes in job/role descriptions.
 - iv. Emphasise positive working conditions such as flexible working arrangements.
 - v. Reinforce the values of the public sector and its primary role of service to the community in job advertisements.

b. Gain gender balance in applicants.

- i. Actively encourage a broad field of people, including talented women, to apply for vacancies, using multiple avenues, such as traditional advertisement, recruitment consultants and informal networking and discussions.
- ii. Provide thorough briefings to recruitment consultants when they are involved to ensure they are aware of the desirability of gender balance in the field of applicants.

c. Assessing suitability of applicants

- i. Selection panels should consist of existing leaders or senior managers who are well versed in the SAES Leadership Competency Framework to assist in ensuring an equitable approach to assessing the suitability of applicants.
- ii. Wherever possible, selection panels should have gender balance but where this is not possible there should be at least one female member.
- iii. Panel members should discuss and define the characteristics considered to be essential and desirable to a role, in so doing, expose and address any inherent gender bias.
- iv. Panel members should consider the previous work experience of women applicants and resultant skills and knowledge transferrable to the relevant vacancy, in a broad manner.
- v. Interview questions will need to be carefully considered to ensure that they are not inherently gender specific or elicit gender specific responses that may disadvantage women.

d. Employment conditions

- i. The Chief Executive of an organisation has discretion over certain conditions of executive employment. Following an offer of employment, a female candidate may request that the Chief Executive consider arrangements relating to absences on account of parenting or other caring responsibilities. For example, if an employee takes leave without pay during the period of the contract by way of parental leave (that is, connected with giving birth to, and caring for a child, or adopting a child), then a Chief Executive could agree that subject to the satisfactory performance by the employee of their duties, and organisational imperatives, at the conclusion of the term of a contract, the person will be offered a further period of employment at least equal to the period of leave without pay.
- ii. A chief executive has some discretion over the salary and non-monetary benefits offered to a person as part of the total remuneration package for an executive role. For example, a chief executive has the discretion to allow continued use of a private plated government vehicle during absences from the workplace of periods greater than four weeks (i.e. during a period of parental leave). This would be charged at 100% of the normal rate. This type of arrangement would minimise paperwork associated with ceasing and recommencing a car lease and minimise the disruption to household arrangements for transportation during parental leave. All discretionary aspects of an executive contract should be considered in order to maximise the attraction and retention of women with caring responsibilities.

Retention

The culture and the values of an organisation are significant factors in the career choices of women. Organisations with a critical mass of women in senior roles are more likely to attract other women to seek senior roles in that organisation. Retention of women in senior roles is therefore important in maintaining an ongoing capacity to recruit women and in turn the achievement and maintenance of the 50% State Strategic Plan target. Ongoing consultation with existing female executives both within and outside of the organisation will assist chief executives and other senior managers in agencies to be properly informed.

Voluntary Flexible Working Arrangements/Work-Family Life Priorities

Consideration should be given to providing flexible work arrangements to a specific executive role prior to advertising the vacancy. These could be highlighted in advertising.

Employees at the executive level, especially those with caring responsibilities - whether for children or aged parents - need flexibility to meet their work and personal responsibilities. Women should not be dissuaded from pursuing executive employment by a perception that such roles are incompatible with or unachievable due to the demands of family life. The use of flexible working arrangements can alleviate the tension that may exist between personal aspirations and lifestyle, and career demands and aspirations.

Flexible working arrangements have largely not been applied to executive roles in the South Australian public sector. Utilisation of working conditions such as flexible start and finish times; time in lieu; working from home arrangements; job share arrangements - or any combination of these is likely to be a powerful indicator to women of the positive nature of the organisational culture and encourage women to apply for executive vacancies.

Monitoring

Agencies will supply to the Office of Public Employment and Review, detail of executive employees as requested through the annual Workforce Information Collection or through other collection mechanisms in a timely manner. Chief executives will have an annual target, specific to their agency as set out in their individual performance agreements. The Office of the Executive Committee of Cabinet along with the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment have a shared responsibility in establishing appropriate individual agency targets.