Checklist for content creation

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

These guidelines aim to help you embed gender equality, diversity and inclusivity in all kinds of content creation, from advertisements for large brands to internal comms documents.

This checklist has been adapted from the *Gender Equality in Advertising and Communications Guidelines: A Guide for Local Government*, developed in partnership with The City of Melbourne. The full guide contains further information on addressing resistance to change and helpful links for people working in advertising, in or outside of local government.

How to apply this checklist

This checklist can support anyone who is involved in the creation of advertising or communications content, including those working in communications, marketing, advertising and media.

These guidelines are a great reference point for individuals or teams to prioritise gender equality and continually check in to see if every piece of work produced thoroughly considers the gendered impacts.

However these guidelines should be applied flexibly, especially for digital and social media content. This content needs to meet audience engagement and algorithms and these guidelines may not always apply.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

☐ Avoid stereotyped representation of gender roles. Depitactions of women cleaning suggests that cleaning up is inappropriate for boys because it is stereotypically associated with women, and men fail to undertake simple household tasks.
Learn more about common female stereotypes in out *Female Stereotypes in Ads guide*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

☐ Avoid reproducing idealised bodies; diversity is important.

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

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

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

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

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

Build gender equality into your policies and practices

☐ Embed gender equality into your corporate processes and templates. For example, gender equality should be part of your creative briefs and tenders, image guidelines and libraries, language and corporate style guides, contract terms, staff and agency recruitment, community engagement frameworks and online platforms.

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

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

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

Create progressive portrayals of all people

☐ Apply the Unstereotype Alliance's 3Ps framework to all marketing communications to create progressive portrayals of all people. First, assess your communications and marketing materials using the *Campaign Bechdel test*.

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

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

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