



# SEE & BE

**Joint Industry Submission:**  
National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

April 2023





# Foreword

On 28 March 2023 at Parliament House in Canberra I hosted a roundtable on gender equality, in partnership with the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA).

The event brought together members of parliament, academics, industry groups and business leaders from across Australia to discuss broadening opportunities, developing pathways, removing barriers and increasing the appeal for women to work in non-traditional trades and STEM vocations.

Focusing on identifying strategies to attract, retain, educate, support, and empower women the group will continue to work towards fostering initiatives to help create a more gender-equitable workforce in male-dominated sectors.



With less than three percent of the tradespeople in non-traditional trades being female, and only a 27% representation of women across STEM, this is an important issue that requires a collaborative effort from industry leaders, policymakers, and other key stakeholders.

The outcomes of the discussions at the roundtable are captured in this submission to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office for Women.

I truly believe that these actions will drive much needed change to create more diverse and inclusive workforces, and ensure that women in these sectors can forge a pathway for future generations of girls so that they can follow in their footsteps.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the following organisations to the roundtable and the development of this submission to government:

- NECA
- Electrical Trades Union (ETU)
- Keystone
- Contact Group
- Schneider Electric
- NAWIC
- Fredon Group
- Build Like A Girl
- Master Plumbers Association
- Axis Plumbing
- Curtin Institute for Energy Transition.

I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to my parliamentary colleagues for their attendance and invaluable contribution to the roundtable, including:

- The Honourable Minister Ed Husic, Minister for Industry and Science

- Ms Kylea Tink MP, Member for North Sydney
- Ms Zali Steggall OAM, MP, Member for Warringah
- Dr Monique Ryan MP, Member for Kooyong
- Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah MP, Member for Sydney
- Ms Allegra Spender MP, Member for Wentworth
- Dr Sophie Scamps MP, Member for Mackellar
- Ms Kate Chaney MP, Member for Curtin.

I support the recommendations made by industry in this submission.

*Zoe Daniel*

**Zoe Daniel MP**  
Member for Goldstein



# Overview

The Australian Government is committed to leading gender equality internationally, however according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report<sup>1</sup>, Australia is ranked 43rd out of 146 countries on the Index.

The Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet released the Status of Women Report Card<sup>2</sup> noting the following trends for careers and working lives of Australian Women:

- Women and men largely work the same jobs they did 35 years ago: caring and clerical professions remain dominated by women while construction trades and labouring professions are dominated by men.
- Women are less likely to participate in the workforce and more likely to work part time.
- A gender pay gap exists in hourly wages and full-time wages, reflecting the impact of gender discrimination, and that lower-paid occupations tend to be female-dominated.
- Women are underrepresented in leadership.

The industry welcomes and acknowledges the range of initiatives recently announced

by the Federal Government, including consultation on the *National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality* led by the Office for Women, as well as the establishment of the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce to provide independent advice to Government on a wide range of women's economic equality issues.

The industry also commends the Hon Chris Bowen MP, Minister for Climate Change and Energy, for pledging gender equality in the clean energy sector by introducing initiatives such as the Australian Women in Energy Roundtable to drive practical actions towards equality based policies.

**Through this submission the industry offers its advice to the government to inform the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality.**

**We are asking the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to consult with us in the design, implementation and delivery of our recommendations.**

**The industry has undertaken early modelling including a range of cost assumptions for proposals within this submission, such as for the mature age apprentices subsidy scheme, female role models and public relations campaign.**

## Industry Recommendations

Industry participants have agreed on the following joint recommendations to the federal government:

- 1** Enable **exemplar projects with a critical mass** of women on sites, of at least 30%.
- 2** Ensure policies and funding are directed towards **priority initiatives** such as subsidies for mature-aged apprentices and more effective government procurement mandates.
- 3** Co-fund with industry a **national public relations campaign** to attract and retain more women to male-dominated sectors.



1. Global Economic Forum (2023), Global Gender Gap Report 2022 (weforum.org)  
 2. Australian Government (2023), Status of Women Report Card (pmc.gov.au)

# Ecosystem

Despite efforts to increase female participation in trades, frustration remains that progress toward gender equality has been marginal at best.

Not only is gender equality a fundamental human right, but having a more diverse, inclusive industry is important to meeting resourcing challenges and skills shortages the sector faces, both now and for the foreseeable future.

Traditional views on careers for women and social influences on women's perceptions of jobs start from an early age.

The industry supports workplace initiatives that remove cultural barriers, break down discriminatory practices, and make the electrotechnology sector a better place to work for everyone.

In construction in particular, women face a range of roadblocks including:

- inadequate provision of accessible, well-maintained, gendered amenities
- inadequate provision of gender-appropriate, well-fitting PPE for women in trades
- Australian Apprenticeship Support Network program that fails to offer industry specificity, hands-on mentoring, and meaningful workplace support to apprentices and women in trades
- insecure, inconsistent, and inflexible working arrangements, particularly in construction
- insufficient access to women-only pre-apprenticeship pathway programs
- lack of outreach and promotion of trade-

related skills and career pathways targeting primary and high-school aged girls

- unaccommodating and hypermasculine workplace cultures
- make apprenticeships financially accessible to women at any age.

Industry is committed to working with the government and broader sectors to establish the construction sector as an employment sector of choice for women.

Both government and industry need to demonstrate through actions that women are welcome participants in all trades and significant contributors to economic recovery and future prosperity.

It makes sense that women who are half of the available workforce should join non-traditional sectors for satisfying, well-paying and long term careers.

By joining industry forces we are committed to actively driving evidence based and genuine change, changing laws, making people accountable for their behaviour, improving workplace culture and ensuring that government leads by example in making women feel valued, safe and welcome in all sectors of the nation's economy.

Only through a holistic approach will industry and government be able to collectively influence the complete ecosystem of women entering the workforce from early education to longer-term career planning in the sector.

The components of this **critical ecosystem** are demonstrated in the chart on the opposite page.

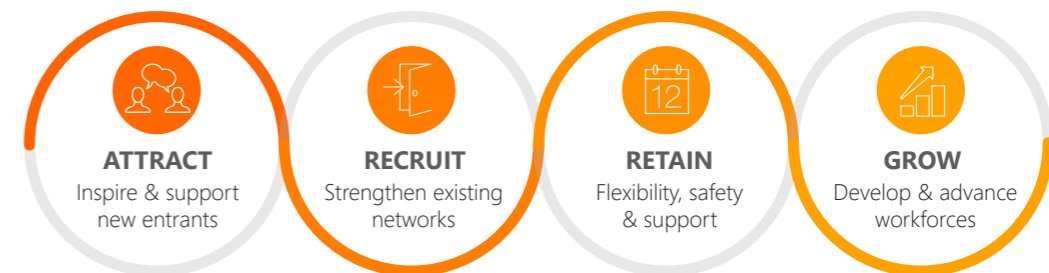
# Gender Equality

## Boosting female participation

### OBJECTIVES



### STRATEGIES



### KEY ENABLERS



### INFLUENCERS



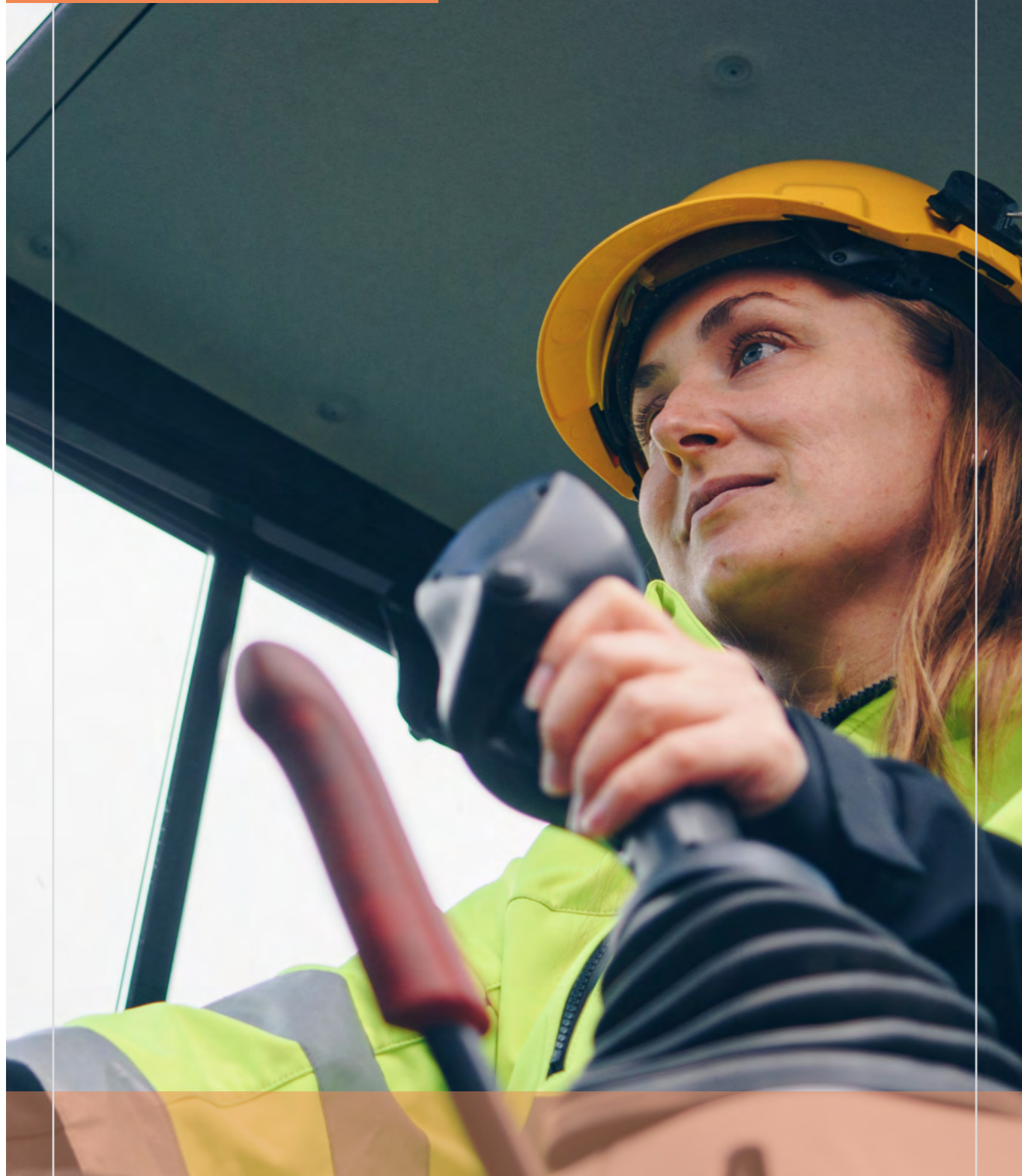
### KEY CHALLENGES



Ongoing engagement, monitoring & improvement



*A more diverse, inclusive industry is important to meeting resourcing challenges and skills shortages the sector faces, both now and for the foreseeable future.*



# 1. Exemplar Sites

## Pilot programs

We have seen significant culture change in corporate environments and boardrooms where female voices are heard, and it is time to break down barriers preventing women from having careers in building.

A target of no less than 30% is required to achieve cultural change and effective work environments conducive to encouraging female participation.

Various studies have proven that with a critical mass of female trades and supervisors on exemplar sites we are likely to see immediate, effective and genuine behavioural influence and culture shift.

If we are to make a meaningful impact on the number of women joining our industry, we need a change to how we approach the issue, a step change is required.

The industry is proposing a pilot program led by the federal government with major construction companies in each jurisdiction to include testing of:

- collaborative methods of setting shifts to balance personal needs and preferences with business output demands.
- staggered start and finish times, on a rostered basis.
- home-based work for desk-based roles.
- empowering and encouraging site managers to make decisions about flexible working arrangements, within a broader company framework.
- supported data collection to identify

barriers to workforce participation within companies.

- support for HR departments and site managers to respond effectively to that information.

The industry can support the federal government's investments in exemplar sites, schemes and trials by utilising its large cohort of apprentices to direct female apprentices to specific sites and work collaboratively with other RTOs and GTOs to deliver the same on such sites.

In collaboration with larger head contractors and subcontractors apprentices can be supported by female supervisors, project engineers and project managers to create greater support and visibility of the female cohort on the site.

## Key considerations

Exemplar sites under the pilot programs will form an important introductory point for apprentice women as they acclimatise to what can often be a hostile working environment.

Whilst the industry acknowledges there is a role for supervisors, project engineers, and project managers within this proposed quota, the industry proposes to work closely with the government to set trade-specific targets on these sites.

The government needs to thoroughly consider the way in which targets are developed, delivered and promoted to avoid unintended consequences.

Workforce gender imbalances and cultural

issues are particularly pronounced in the trades and mismatches in skill-specific knowledge and workplace power may act as an impediment to non-trade workers being able to provide full support to tradeswomen in need of assistance or advice.

It is recommended a minimum target of 10% of apprentices on exemplar sites to be women, with specific conditions for hiring and training local women and targeting high-skill trade occupations.

However these targets need to be developed with and by the workforce to avoid negative consequences for women who can often be labelled as a 'token' apprenticeship or worse, accused of 'stealing a boy's job'.

Connecting pre-employment pathways to recruitment strategies will ensure women have the opportunity to apply for apprenticeships on an equal footing to their male counterparts and employers committing to draw from successful pools of graduate prevocational women is a more nuanced approach that will reduce the risk of unintended consequences.

These strategies must also be accompanied by strong workplace education strategies to remove stigma.

We would also support the implementation of an evidence-based ratchet mechanism to progressively increase targets and expand successfully trialled practices across the entire industry.

These need to be developed in consultation with tradeswomen.

## Culture training

Lack of training results in poor behaviour, and lack of support results in silence.

There will remain a need for targeted cultural training, to ensure that males that struggle with the transition are educated to understand what behaviours are expected.

The federal government needs to allocate funds to develop appropriate cultural training for all apprentices and workers inducted onsite, and support workers in developing respectful relationships through culture change.

The training is required to be targeted, informed and address all errant behaviours including coercive control, sexual harassment, discrimination and workplace behaviour.

This training assists not only in the context of the work site but can continue into the domestic relationships of industry participants.

Culture of abuse and culture of silence should not be tolerated on work sites.

The industry is asking the government to support male-dominated sectors by enabling independent and confidential mechanisms for women to raise complaints in relation to inappropriate behaviour made by male colleagues on sites.

The government and industry need to make sure female workers are aware of this service and related policies, and that making a complaint will not result in ramifications for them. Further support networks need to be provided in the form of dedicated apprentice mentoring programs, support services for mental health, domestic violence support network and culture training for males and females.

## Female facilities and childcare

Facility upgrades are required on construction sites, to enable basic amenities for female workers, including changing facilities, designated lunch areas, toilets and showers, and maintain those to appropriate standards and expectations.

Such facilities need to be genuinely accessible and at no greater inconvenience than facilities offered as standard to male workers.

Another reason why women leave the building and construction industry is the long hours that are required by workers onsite.

The necessity of safety discussions, particularly toolbox talks commence early in the morning and engage all trades and site participants, outside the hours of childcare providers and out of school programs.

Childcare facilities and subsidy programmes that were designed for these sectors would encourage greater and more diverse participation for all cohorts.

Having onsite childcare and afterschool care will ensure that parents are close to their children in the event of unforeseen issues and will reduce the amount of travel time required to attend to their children's needs.

This alone would act as a significant incentive for women to not only join their designated projects, but also remain in the industry during the early years of their children's lives.

These considerations should also extend to VET providers where female apprentices also face similar issues. Many of the older VET facilities in Australia were constructed during a period where women's participation was actively excluded, let alone considered.

## Recommendation 1 - Summary

To successfully enable exemplar projects with a critical mass of women on sites, industry is asking the federal government to set an example by publicly declaring its zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour, bullying, intimidation or discrimination towards women in male dominated sectors.

We are also asking the government to develop an ongoing program of pilot sites from publicly funded infrastructure investments as exemplar sites, in consultation with state and territory which characterise the following:

- at least 30% females on sites (this criteria will need to be developed in close consultation with industry and audited continuously to ensure absolute efficacy)
- set a minimum target of 10% of apprentices on exemplar sites to be women, with specific conditions for hiring and training local women and targeting high-skill trade occupations
- provide culture training and mechanisms that support safe and effective complaint processes
- provide appropriate female facilities at a minimum
- provide childcare support services
- offer an incentive scheme to encourage women to migrate to these sites, eg \$1,000 as sign on bonus, or similar.



*Chronic skills shortages can be met by quality female and mature age candidates who are eager to work and complete an apprenticeship.*



## 2. Policies and Funding

### Better procurement

The aspiration for businesses to employ more women in non-traditional roles has been strong for many years, but the incentive for women to join the sector remains unchanged.

Work practices and cultural norms that characterise the building and construction industry need to be addressed.

Industry and government can drive change through contracts, however such policy changes need to be developed in close consultation with the industry to ensure such policies are indeed successful and effective in driving change in the sector.

Procurement credit should be awarded for contracts of sites that roster flexibility, are committed to building female facilities, conduct regular auditing and achieve gender pay equity.

Employee amenities (such as on site or nearby childcare) will need to be subsidised and should be considered in all government procurement contracts as part of their evaluation criteria.

The federal government is a significant purchaser of goods and services, and needs to ensure its purchasing power supports value for money while growing economies and job opportunities.

Through the Buy Australian Plan the government needs to introduce

procurement best practice principles to maximise opportunities for engagement of female workforces particularly in male-dominated sectors, and in industries such as construction.

Commonwealth procurement policies need to demonstrate a commitment to providing appropriate amenities for women, gender pay equity, and flexible working arrangements.

These minimum procurement requirements should also factor in the provision of well-fitting, gender-appropriate PPE for women. Women are not small men.

We also note the ongoing work from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to establish an Australian Skills Guarantee which seeks to ensure that federally funded projects hire more apprentices and target recruitment of women and First Nations apprentices.

It is important to consider that while these changes would be welcomed, Commonwealth procurement policies will only apply to a specific segment of job sites around the country.

In order to fully address the existing gaps in workplace conditions for women in trades, these requirements need to be made enforceable economy-wide through legislating them into the Work Health and Safety Act 2011, as well as relevant State and Territory legislation.



## Mature age apprentices

The federal government has an immediate opportunity to design a scheme to support mature aged apprenticeships and address skills shortages in the broader sector.

The cost to hire a mature age apprentice is a challenge for all businesses, on average it is 44% greater in the first year than that of a junior apprentice, 33% in the second year, 24% in year three before gradually decreasing to only 6% difference in the fourth year.

Addressing the unwillingness of certain employers to take on mature-aged apprentices due to the increased additional cost when compared to junior apprentices undoubtedly carries gendered implications on the industry, with most women in electrical trades entering as mature aged apprentices.

However, mature aged apprentices including young people over 21 offer great benefits as potential tradespeople due to their life and work experience, commitment to work and training, qualifications, appreciation of safety protocols and many more.

The current disincentive to hire mature age candidates particularly disadvantages women, who are more likely to apply for an apprenticeship when over 21.

The industry recommends the federal government enter bilateral agreements with

state governments to institute a capped and temporary subsidy scheme to remove wage barriers for Australian businesses wishing to engage mature age female apprentices on sites.

Under the subsidy scheme it is proposed that employers of mature age apprentices claim the difference (or portion of the difference depending on employer eligibility), as a government rebate, between wage costs of a junior apprentice and those of a mature age apprentice.

The scheme is proposed to act as a temporary measure only to help attract more mature aged women to trades and address skills shortages in the building and construction sector.

As obligations to engage female workers increase across the sector and businesses begin to recognise the benefits of female and mature age apprentices, the need for government subsidies will subsequently decrease and diminish over time.

The subsidy is one incentive to level the playing field and more needs to be done to also effectively address the cost of living pressures that apprentices face.

One of the most significant barriers to women over 21 taking up an apprenticeship is the question of income, and the industry believes that the government needs to consider stronger reforms in consultation with industry to make apprenticeships financially accessible to women at any age.

## AASN System Reform

There is a lack of designated role models for recruitment, education, mentoring, and support as a significant handbrake on recruitment and retention outcomes in electrical trades over the last decade.

Australian Apprenticeship Support Networks (AASNs) is in urgent need of reform from its current state, into a model with industry specificity, and genuine industry backing could enable the provision of dedicated female mentors able to offer personalised advice and support on workplace issues, elective choices, and study-related questions.

These revitalised AASNs would also be empowered to take on more responsibility for recruitment programs like school outreach and pre-apprenticeship program facilitation, as well as undertaking anonymised exit surveys to generate a reliable data on where industry still needs to improve in retaining women.

The industry proposes to work with the government on a reform and revitalisation of AASN services.

The industry is in a position to work with the government in engaging suitably skilled and experienced female representatives to implement initiatives focused on increasing female participation and retention in trade-based occupations.

## Recommendation 2 - Summary

To ensure policies and funding allocations are effective and maximise outcomes for Australian women, the industry proposes:

- Government's purchasing power has the ability to drive direction of investment including a greater commitment to female participation.
- Government procurement policies need to demonstrate a commitment to providing appropriate amenities for women, gender pay equity, and flexible working arrangements
- To address immediate skills shortages across the sector, the government has the opportunity to provide subsidy schemes to encourage greater uptake of mature age apprentices.
- Government subsidies and reforms are required to make apprenticeships financially accessible to women at any age.
- AASN System Reform is required in close consultation with industry in order to effectively enable the provision of dedicated female mentors / role models who can provide personalised advice and guidance, as well as active engagements through school outreach and pre-apprenticeship program facilitation.



*You can't be what you can't see.*



## 3. PR Campaign

### Overview

The industry will work together on a joint national public relations, awareness and education campaign.

The industry is seeking co-contribution from the federal government to support the initiatives outlined in the following phases of the campaign.

We are inviting the government to form part of our ongoing consultation efforts in the development of the campaign, with due consideration of co-funding of activities affecting primarily the public sector (eg awareness in public schools).

The following phases outline the proposed approach by industry:

### Phase 1: Stakeholder Consultation

#### Deep Dive: July 2023, Melbourne CBD

- Industry and government engagement to define scope of work, barriers and opportunities.
- Stakeholder landscape mapping to inform engagement activities: this is a joint exercise to define the general position of stakeholder groups based on their likely support of female participation - by geographic location and segment.
- Review of the elements of Keystone's

"A Woman's Place" campaign in the context of a potential national rollout. [See: https://buildsomethingbig.com.au/women/](https://buildsomethingbig.com.au/women/)

- Consider existing initiatives at both state and national levels, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Broadly identify messaging, themes and potential branding.
- Consider funding options, including in-kind media support and various forms of industry sponsorships (to be discussed at the deep dive)

#### National Workshops

- The industry's in-depth scoping activity to determine the outline of a major public relations campaign targeting recruitment of more women, will also be undertaken through a further inclusive approach that actively engages women already in the industry.
- Workshop activities in every major city and some select regional hubs throughout the second half of 2023 are proposed to be folded into the preliminary stages of the Deep Dive session of the PR campaign to gather perspectives and ideas directly from workers themselves.
- Additional primary and secondary research activities will be undertaken to appropriately and effectively inform the campaign development.

## Phase 2: Campaign rollout

- Ensure ongoing stakeholder consultation informs all activities.
- Invest in research: schedule sentiment testing with focus groups, or online surveys to inform work where required.
- Develop a communications and engagement strategy, identifying audiences, channels for engagement and timing.
- Ensure complementary initiatives like the “Schedule a Chat” function of the Keystone campaign and hands-on elements of the proposed “See & Be” sub-campaign should be fully integrated to progress interested women through the pipeline into apprenticeships.
- Media generated as part of this campaign should actively involve and promote aforementioned “exemplar sites” as a demonstration of progress underway in the industry
- Consider public relations activities in the form of disruptive marketing (eg temporary “Mansplaining Hotline”, see: <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/sweden-launches-national-mansplaining-hotline-men-call-complain-n685966>)
- Consider the development of a documentary or TV report based on specific priorities under the campaign, with talent to be sourced from within participating industry groups.
- Key channels for consideration: website, social media campaign, television advertisements, print, radio, stakeholder

events, existing networks across industry and government.

- For noting, all participants in the Keystone campaign are real women working in real businesses, which was crucial to industry and community engagement.
- The website won a creative award for content and user experience this week – it sits under the umbrella of our Be Part of Building Something Big campaign which aims to articulate a coherent and inspiring identity for the industry.

## Phase 3: Education

- Continue raising awareness of the PR campaign, across all levels of education sectors (primary, secondary, tertiary).
- Develop a sub-campaign “See & Be” targeted at education cohorts at all levels, including:
  - school visits to incorporate practical activities that expose young women and girls to the novel, interesting, and in many instances fun to learn skills that they may one day make use of in an apprenticeship
  - practical activities like bringing testing boards into classrooms or career days also form a natural step in the progression towards pre-apprenticeship programs available to school-aged students.
  - other concepts like picture books aimed at pre-K or primary aged girls, or an industry sponsored national competition encouraging

girls to construct and submit projects using engineering skills would provide a much more accessible form of exposure to the industry from a young age and help to break down cultural barriers

- incentivise university groups or outreach organisations (including STEM) to host events with female students in upper primary school as the target audience
- introduce diversity discussions into subjects in primary school classrooms/curriculum.
- while gifted and talented programs vary in primary schools and secondary schools, universities can start to engage with gifted and talented programs from primary school so students can start to think about future careers.

## Phase 4: Don't stop

The campaign will aim to raise public awareness, allow women to engage directly with industry, build general community awareness and confidence, while promoting open and genuine engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

Ongoing review, monitoring and improvement will be critical to the ongoing success of the public relations efforts.

**We are asking the federal government to partner with the industry through engagement and co-funding of national public awareness and education activities.**

## Recommendation 3 - Summary

To attract, recruit, retain and grow female participation in male-dominated sectors, the industry recommends influencing the influencers in lives of young girls and women through a public awareness, education and engagement campaign:

- ongoing engagement and education on opportunities and needs while addressing key barriers
- industry-led stakeholder consultations starting with a full-day deep dive to develop the public relations campaign, including:
  - developing the stakeholder landscape
  - locational priorities
  - need for research and consultation
  - agree on messaging and branding
  - identify key aspects of the communication strategy
- the deep dive will be complemented by further consultations with women across the country through a range of workshops to be held in major cities and select regional hubs to appropriately inform the campaign
- embed successful initiatives, eg Keystone’s Schedule a Chat function nationally
- ensure education efforts deliver a hands-on approach through school visits and practical activities.



# Contact

Submission Coordinator

Ms Irma Beganovic

Government Relations Manager

National Electrical and Communications Association

Email: [irma.beganovic@neca.asn.au](mailto:irma.beganovic@neca.asn.au)