



Starting a Gender Working Group?

Cultural Practice's top 10 questions to ask yourself to make sure you're headed in the right direction

So you've decided to form a gender working group. You're not alone. With the renewed attention to gender equality and women's equality from donors and the development community, many organizations are finding they need to be more proactive about addressing gender inequalities in their programs and in their workplaces. Many organizations form gender working groups (GWG) to maximize limited resources even when dedicated staff for gender integration is present. If you and your colleagues find yourselves asking whether a GWG is right for you, keep calm and read on.

1. Why do you want to form a gender working group?

As you begin, make sure to clearly define the goals and vision of your working group. Organizations embark on gender integration efforts for different reasons. In some cases, staff may be concerned about workplace issues, like maternity leave or a lack of women in senior positions. Other organizations are interested in improving their competitive edge for new business by addressing gender issues in proposals and programs. Being clear about the purpose of the GWG will also help clarify the resources you might need to support its activities.

2. Have you identified the right entry points for your organization?

Each organization's entry point to gender integration will be different and should be grounded in an assessment of the opportunities and constraints for action. Some organizations start by addressing programmatic issues, while others begin with the organization's policies. Whether you begin with workplace or programmatic issues, staff will quickly begin to reflect on how gender issues affect different aspects of their work. Beginning with programs often leads to staff asking questions about whether their own house is in order; while starting with an internal exercise, often initiates discussions about whether or not the programmatic concerns are more important.

3. Have you identified quick wins and longer-term goals?

Working groups need to identify short-term and long-term goals. Short-term wins are important for energizing and motivating working group members. They are also important for building a strong team within the working group. At the same time, these short-term wins raise the visibility of the group within the organization, which is important for galvanizing external support over the long-term. These quick wins need to be balanced with an agenda that identifies goals over the medium to long term.

4. Do you have support from leadership?

In some cases leadership may be responsive and supportive of the GWG's goals from the start. In others, working groups will need to put more effort in communicating the group's goals to leadership. Making the case to leadership why attention to gender issues benefits the organization is crucial. Why? Some activities will require additional funding to complete. Having support from leadership improves the chances you'll receive the financial support you need. Approval from leadership also strengthens the likelihood that new policies and procedures will be implemented.

5. Can your members spend their time on Working Group activities?

Working groups evolve over time. They may start as a group of interested advocates but as an agenda takes shape and activities are defined, it may no longer be possible to meet over everyone's lunch time. You and your colleagues will need to carve time out of your schedules to attend meetings and work on projects. You will want to do this with the approval of your supervisor. Time dedicated to a gender task force or working group should be considered a part of your job and included in your job description. Make sure you address this early with supervisors and leadership to make sure that everyone who wishes to be involved can do so without any negative consequences.

6. How will the group operate?

GWGs work best when members divide and conquer rather than trying to tackle all tasks together. Operating through subgroups helps to maintain members' enthusiasm because they feel they're personally contributing to one of the group outputs and it gives each member a voice. While outputs may need to be reviewed by designated group decision makers this structure helps reduce the amount of time members spend reviewing outputs and shifts it to more creative efforts. Additionally, you will need to decide how frequently the group and/or subgroups will meet and how decisions will be made. This will help determine your timeline for achieving your goals.

7. Are you communicating effectively to staff and leadership?

Communication is key to increasing the visibility, support, and understanding of the GWG's activities. Different groups within the organization may need different kinds of information. For example, you may need to develop regular communications memos for leadership and upper management to keep them informed. For staff, a newsletter or quarterly update with information about the GWG's work, resources, and reflections can increase the value of the group and keep gender integration on everyone's minds.

8. How can you engage the field offices?

If your organization has staff in field offices, you will want to engage them from the beginning. Country staff are often confronting gender issues both in their workplace and in their programs that are important to understand and support. They have valuable expertise and insight into the organization's operations and programs. Bring them in early. You will find you have allies in different countries and will be grateful for the coalitions you can build across the organization.

9. Is the group diverse?

GWGs benefit from involving members from diverse backgrounds. Research has shown that teams with greater diversity can lead to more innovative outcomes. To the extent possible, it should avoid tokenism or relying on one person to represent an entire group of people's views with which they share a racial, ethnic, or gender identity. It is important to remember that individuals represent multiple identities and the intersection of these identities, for example race and gender, should not be overlooked.

10. Do you need external support?

Whether an organization has a GWG and/or dedicated staff to address gender issues, it is always useful to be able to call on external support for specific projects. Building a roster of trusted and qualified gender analysts is useful when you need additional support and targeted expertise. Some projects can be easily handled within a GWG, while others may need the extra support and time from an external

advisor who can provide perspective and expertise on a specific topic, and dedicate the time and focus to your project.

We're here to help. Cultural Practice, LLC (CP) works with donors and implementing organizations to build staff's understanding of key gender issues and foster an enabling environment for strategically and sustainably integrating gender issues in the workplace and throughout the program cycle. This process consists of a set of complementary and participatory activities including: assessing organizations' needs; building internal capacity through training and mentoring; strategy development; and development of tailor-made tools to address inequalities between men and women throughout the life of a project.

[Contact us](#) for more information about how CP can support your GWG and gender integration efforts.

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