

# Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice



: women,  
equity,  
architecture.

Helping architecture to become a more equitable and flexible profession, one that offers opportunity for all and is well positioned to meet contemporary challenges



**PARLOUR GUIDES  
TO EQUITABLE  
PRACTICE**

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## Architecture is in the midst of substantial change.

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How architects define themselves, how practices operate, and the range of roles and types of work pursued – all is up for grabs.

Since the research underpinning the guides began in 2011, many women and men in Australian architecture have stepped forward to ask for a more inclusive profession, one that assists women and men to better balance their professional and personal lives, to realise their full potential, and to stay in the profession.

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## The Parlour guides will help facilitate this change.

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Addressed to practices, employees and the wider profession, the Parlour guides outline the key issues facing women in architecture and provide positive, productive strategies for change.



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# Why do we need the guides?

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Women have been an active and successful part of Australian architecture for over a century. However, they leave the profession at much higher rates than men, experience career constrictions that limit their ability to participate, and are dramatically under-represented at senior levels of the profession. Overall, there is a significant mismatch between education successes and career opportunities available to women in Australian architecture.

The reasons for this gap are complex and multifaceted, but it is clear that the structures and cultures of architectural practice and workplaces play a significant role in perpetuating inequity. Research from other professions and industries shows that a more conscious approach to workplace practices can help change patterns of behaviour and processes that restrict women's advancement.

**Ethical case** There is a clear ethical argument for developing a more equitable profession. Women in architecture should have access to the same opportunities as their male colleagues, and should be valued for the quality of their work.

**Business case** There is also a strong business case, which has been identified through a large body of research in other fields. Put simply, significant creative and economic advantages flow when a business draws on a broad range of skills, perspectives and expertise. Well-managed teams with a diversity of experience and expertise have better problem-solving skills and produce better, more inventive outcomes.

Architectural practices that foster equitable workplaces will also reap the benefits of a productive and motivated team. They will retain highly skilled and experienced employees (thus avoiding the substantial costs associated with staff turnover), and this will help the practice to grow and develop.

Finally, practices will better mirror client groups and have better access to wider networks.

**Professional case** The attrition of highly educated and skilled architects diminishes architecture's potential for change and renewal. If the profession is to adapt effectively to new environments we need more people who think in diverse ways, not fewer. A more diverse architectural community will also help develop a future for the profession, and allow it to effectively engage with significant global challenges.



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## Who are the guides for?

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**Everyone!** Gender is not just a women's issue. Gender-based discrimination needs to be tackled by everyone: women and men, employers and employees, universities and professional bodies.

These guides will help everyone work towards a more equitable profession – in the way we do things and in the way we think about things. If the profession is to change with any speed, men need to be as actively involved as women.

Many of the challenges that face women in architecture also affect men. But they tend to impact on women in exaggerated ways. The architecture firm of the future – with increased flexibility, meaningful part-time work, acceptable career breaks and reasonable hours – will benefit us all.

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## How do the guides work?

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There is no one reason for women's significant under representation in architecture and no one solution. As a result, the guides provide multiple tactics to deal with multiple issues.

**A two-fold strategy for change** The guides identify eleven workplace issues that may impede or slow women's careers and then provide strategies to develop different, more equitable work practices.

**We can all make a difference**

Recommendations are organised according to different roles. This acknowledges that practices, employees and professional groups can effect change in different ways. However, it is important to understand each other's perspectives, and we encourage readers to look at all sections to help gain insight into what can be done from multiple directions.

**Acknowledging different experiences**

As you read the guides some observations will chime with your own experiences; others may not. This is because the guides discuss women and men as groups. Understanding the experiences of groups is important for helping to identify structural factors; however, it can also lead to generalisations that will not match all individual experiences.

Perceptions and experiences of gender bias can also change over time. Many small events add up to affect women's careers, and inequity does not affect all women evenly or in the same way.

One of the fundamentals of an equitable and inclusive profession is having empathy and acknowledging that the experiences of others may be different from your own.



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# Get started!

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Each guide provides detailed advice, but but there are some recurring themes, which we outline below.

- Understand the ethical and the business cases for an equitable architecture profession.
- Value your work and that of your colleagues, employees and the profession.
- Ensure your practice is managed well.
- Be clear about who is responsible for HR, workflow and employee management.
- Have robust and equitable policies and procedures in place, which can be understood and used by all.
- Understand how your own practice works, being sensitive to how its structure, management and leadership model affect equity issues.
- Be aware of unconscious bias and have strategies to counter it.
- Know your rights and responsibilities as an employee and as an employer.
- Plan your career and think laterally and creatively about what a career might be.
- Be confident, competent and well-informed.
- Speak up, be visible and negotiate.

Good luck and please let us know if the guides have been useful to you.

Contact Parlour   
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## References

Each guide includes a set of further resources. In addition to these topic-specific resources, the following publications and reports provide broad accounts of the issues facing women within architecture.

### **'Why Do Women Leave Architecture?'**

Ann de Graft Johnson, Sandra Manley and Clara Greed (London: Royal Institute of British Architects, University of West England, 2003)

### **'Women in Architecture in Canada'**

Eva Matsuzaki, Patricia Gibb and Imbi Harding, Consultations & Roundtables on Women in Architecture in Canada (Vancouver: Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, 2003).

### ***Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession***

Annamarie Adams and Peta Tancred (University of Toronto Press, 2000)

### ***Going Places: The Career Progression of Women in the Architectural Profession***

Paula Whitman (Royal Australian Institute of Architects and Queensland University of Technology, 2005)

There is a large amount of material on the business case for gender equity. The following provides a good overview.

### **'Only Skin Deep: Re-examining the Business Case for Diversity'**

Deloitte Point of View Human Capital Australia, September 2011

[http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-Australia/Local%20Assets/Documents/Services/Consulting/Human%20Capital/Diversity/Deloitte\\_Only\\_skin\\_deep\\_12\\_September\\_2011.pdf](http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-Australia/Local%20Assets/Documents/Services/Consulting/Human%20Capital/Diversity/Deloitte_Only_skin_deep_12_September_2011.pdf)

### **'The Business Case for Gender Equality'**

Workplace Gender Equity Agency

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/2013-04-29%20BRANDED%20FINAL%20businesscase%20for%20web.pdf>

## Further reading

### **Women in Architecture campaign**

Architects Journal

<http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/events/wia>

### **'Women in Architecture'**

Karen Burns, Parlour

<http://www.archiparlour.org/women-and-architecture/>

### **'Architecture, Gender, Economics'**

Justine Clark, Parlour

<http://www.archiparlour.org/gender-architecture-economics/>

### **'Who Wants to be a Woman Architect?'**

Karen Burns, Parlour

<http://www.archiparlour.org/who-wants-to-be-a-woman-architect/>

See Parlour  for an extensive range of further research and discussion on gender and equity in Australian architecture.

<http://www.archiparlour.org/>



### Credits

The Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice are an outcome of the research project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership' (2011–2014), led by Naomi Stead of the University of Queensland.

The development of the guides was led by Justine Clark and Naomi Stead, working with Susie Ashworth and Neph Wake.

The guides were designed by Catherine Griffiths.

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### Disclaimer

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: women, equity, architecture.



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