

05. Recruitment:



: women,
equity,
architecture.

Equitable recruitment is an important place to start building an equitable practice and profession. Recruitment processes in architectural practices range from very casual to tightly managed. Whatever the process used, recruitment needs to be done well to ensure that the practice attracts and keeps the best people, and that all applicants have equal opportunity. Satisfied employees, high levels of performance and competitive strength are just some of the rewards for practices that handle recruitment well.

This guide provides advice on fair and equitable recruitment strategies and processes for both employers and employees. It includes material for those starting out in their career and those at more senior levels.



**PARLOUR GUIDES
TO EQUITABLE
PRACTICE**

www.archiparlour.org

PUBLICATION PARTNER



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

msd

Melbourne
School of Design

FACULTY OF
ARCHITECTURE,
BUILDING AND
PLANNING

www.msduimelb.edu.au



What are the challenges and opportunities in recruitment?

Recruitment plays a fundamental role in determining the development and direction of architectural practices and of individual careers.

Ensuring that the right people are hired can have an enormous influence on the success of a practice. Yet substantial research and anecdotes indicate that unconscious assumptions and personal biases have a huge impact on recruitment decisions.

Bias and behaviour Substantial research in a range of fields indicates that women and men are likely to assess job applications differently according to the gender of the applicant. Particularly alarming research from the US has found that ‘managers of both sexes are twice as likely to hire a man as a woman’ despite applicants having equal skills. This is an effect of established cultural norms, but there are strategies that can be put in place to prevent unconscious bias impacting on recruitment processes.

Research has also found that male candidates tend to inflate their skills and experience during interviews, while many women tend to downplay theirs. These trends have also been widely observed anecdotally in architectural practice in Australia.

Parlour’s own research has found that women with family responsibilities and those looking for part-time or flexible work experience particular problems with recruitment bias.

Cultural fit ‘Cultural fit’ is a favourite topic in HR circles. It means employing people who will fit into the culture of the office, as well as having the required skills. This can be particularly important in small practices, where clashes can be destructive and expensive.

The downside is that a narrow definition of cultural fit can also result in only employing people who look like the directors, or who have the same tastes, background and outlook on life. This is not good for a practice. It readily leads to ‘group think’ and a resulting loss of creativity and inventiveness, while also limiting the practice’s networks and potential.

The trick for practices is to have a good understanding of the culture the office seeks to develop, and to ensure that diversity is an important part of this.

If practices look for employees who ‘fit’ by contributing to diversity and bringing fresh perspectives, the practice will avoid bias, constantly learn new things and expand its potential.



Why does it matter?

We need equitable recruitment processes to ensure that women contribute to their best capacity and have satisfying, meaningful careers in architecture. It is also important to ensure that practices and the profession make the most of all talented architects, not just those in a particular demographic.

Much of the following material is also relevant to promotion procedures within practices.

Practices

Equitable recruitment is a business issue as well as a legal and ethical one. It is about attracting and retaining the best people for the job and the practice, and building a strong company culture with committed, dedicated staff. Practices should think laterally about who these people might be and where they might find them.

Poor recruitment decisions mean that some practices are not as well-staffed as they could be. It can also be harmful to company culture and morale, and may lead to high staff turnover, which incurs further substantial business costs.

Talented people want to work in equitable workplaces. If your practice is not seen as an equitable and desirable workplace, you're probably missing out on many high-quality potential employees.

Well-honed recruitment skills are also invaluable for internal project team formation, outsourcing services and engaging contractors and consultants, as well as hiring new staff.

Employees

Good recruitment practices play an important role in women's careers, prospects and progression. Poor recruitment decisions – including undervaluing women who are hired – can have long-term ramifications and impede women's progress and participation. Bias in recruitment impacts particularly severely on women who also have family commitments.

The profession

Equitable recruitment leads to more equitable workplaces and to a more balanced, engaged and effective profession.



What can we do?

Architectural practices can play a fundamental role in ensuring fair recruitment. Employers must step up to the challenge of addressing any biases within their systems. Potential employees should be aware of existing challenges and make sure they navigate these strategically. Professional bodies can play an important role in continuing to educate and inform employers and employees alike.

Improvements can be made at three stages:

- Recruitment search
- Shortlisting, interview and selection
- Start of employment

Practices

It is important to understand how bias can impact on recruitment and to have clear processes and policies in place to guide equitable recruitment in your practice. This will ensure you are well positioned to find and hire the best candidate.

This is relevant to the informal systems that many architectural practices employ, as well as to more structured approaches.

Everyone involved in recruitment should be aware of how bias creeps in and have clear strategies to address this.

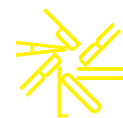
Be an informed employer

Employment procedures are regulated by a range of legal frameworks that protect the employer and the employee. Nonetheless, bias is rife in recruitment, and is often not seen or acknowledged.

- Make sure those conducting recruitment and interviews understand their responsibilities under the *Fair Work Act 2009*, the relevant Award and anti-discrimination legislation.
- Make sure those involved in recruitment have good interview skills, are aware of how bias can play out in the recruitment process and that they understand the well-researched behavioural differences between many women and men. Have strategies to manage these differences and to not be swayed by them so you can assess what really matters. This guide should help.

Establish policies and strategies

Policy and strategies play an important role in guiding the development of a practice and ensuring that everyone – employees and employers alike – understand the values, aims and commitments of the practice, and the means of achieving these.



- Have a recruitment policy in place that clearly articulates the practice's commitment to gender equity and outlines the processes to achieve this.
- Ensure that all staff involved in recruitment understand this policy.
- Relate the recruitment strategy to the practice's business strategy and staff development policies and processes.

Include women in the decision-making process

If your firm is serious about increasing women's participation and retention, it is advisable to include women (preferably architects) on both sides of the table.

- Where possible, have women on your search panel and interview panel, as well as participating in resourcing and salary decisions, and promotion discussions.

Check the pool

If your applicant pool, shortlisting or appointments are significantly unbalanced you may have a problem with bias in your processes.

- Run a quick gender audit across recent applications – both solicited and unsolicited. If it doesn't match the gender balance of the profession, talented candidates may be self-selecting out. Consider what this might say about how your practice is perceived?
- Check the gender balance of any recent short-lists against both the applicants and the demographics of the profession. If they don't match, you may be inadvertently screening out qualified women.
- Keep an eye on things. Don't just do an audit once. Monitor gender balance in recruitment on an ongoing basis.
- See the **Parlour website** for information about demographics in Australian architecture.

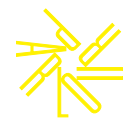
Widen the net

Make sure you are looking for a diverse range of candidates in all the right places, and take steps to ensure bias doesn't creep in. This applies to both informal referrals and formal searches.

Many architecture practices use personal and professional networks, and those of their existing employees, to recruit new staff. This can be productive, but it may also narrow the field and favour those with strong personal networks at the expense of talented people with fewer connections – often those from diverse backgrounds.

Employment agencies can work to expand the field or to contract it. Make sure that any recruitment agencies you work with value diversity and don't reinforce gender biases.

- If you use informal networks, make sure that the networks are diverse themselves. Tap into a range of networks across different demographics.
- When asking for recommendations from others – colleagues, peers, employees – make sure they understand that you are looking for a diverse pool of talent.
- If you use an agency, request a range of candidates, including both women and men.
- If your agency supplies a fairly homogenous group, ask to see the list of people they have rejected on your behalf. Reiterate that you want a diverse and inclusive field. If they just don't 'get it', find a new agency.
- If you use several recruitment agencies, be mindful of who returns the most diverse lists.



Define the role

Taking time to think critically about the job and its requirements can pay dividends in terms of attracting good candidates and avoiding bias at all stages of the recruitment process.

- Have a firm idea of the job, its responsibilities and demands before you start thinking about the characteristics of the person you imagine filling it.
- Consider if you need to replace like with like, or is this an opportunity to diversify the skills and experience within the practice?
- Be clear about what the role entails and don't pre-empt the kind of people who might have the skills to fulfil it.
- When formulating a job description, be sure to drill down into the fundamental requirements of a role, rather than simply describing the person who last filled it.
- Consider if the role would be suitable for a part-time or flexible-hours worker.

Write a good job advertisement

The tenor and tone of the advertisement can play an important role in attracting the right candidates, while the wrong tone may put off great potential candidates.

- Aim for a tone in the advertisement that matches the culture you wish to continue or develop in the practice.
- Ensure you use gender-neutral language. (This is a legal requirement.)
- Avoid using jargon and acronyms – this may exclude applicants who might otherwise be well placed to apply.
- Be clear if there are some aspects of the position that are negotiable, and if salary is negotiable. This is an important way of establishing a more even basis for negotiation.
 - See Parlour guide: **Negotiation**.

Be careful with 'cultural fit'

'Cultural fit' can be very important to creating a productive working environment. However, narrow understandings of the concept can also lead to poor recruitment and can restrict the demographic makeup of the practice.

- Be careful how you understand 'cultural fit'. Don't use it as an excuse to only hire people in your own image.
- Look honestly at the culture of your firm. Does it embrace difference or only accept sameness? Start making changes if need be.
- Consider what culture you want to develop. Recognise that opening the practice up to someone who's not a traditional 'fit' might change your culture for the better.
- Remember that in a team environment a range of skill sets, approaches, backgrounds and opinions lead to a more productive office.

Focus on skills

When assessing applications and shortlisting, it is important to focus on the skills required to successfully fill the role.

For example, you might preference somebody with five years of experience on health projects, when actually you need someone with a sound understanding of the regulatory requirements and previous experience working with Department of Health committees. Some people may fit both descriptions, but others may have the requisite skills even though they are short on the time requirement.

- Be precise about the skills and aptitudes that the position requires.
- Avoid the temptation to use length of experience as a proxy. Architects with discontinuous career paths (particularly those attempting to re-enter the workforce) may be excluded by specific length-of-experience requirements.



Interview well

Interviews should be structured in a way that gives all applicants a fair opportunity to present themselves well and to clearly articulate what they could bring to the position and the company.

There are many resources available about equitable interviewing techniques. The following is a start.

- All interviewers should be familiar with good practice interview skills and should have the ability to listen and extract information to help make good decisions.
- Have more than one person conduct the interview and where possible include a woman architect on the panel.
- Try to have the same people interview all candidates.
- Ask a similar set of questions to all candidates.
- Ask questions that focus on the skills and abilities relevant to the position.
- Steer clear of personal questions. What might seem like harmless small talk may result in unconscious bias from your end or be perceived as discrimination on the other.
- Be aware of the research indicating that many men overplay their skills and abilities, while many women tend to underplay them. If you suspect this is happening ask further detailed questions to both male and female candidates to gain a detailed understanding of their abilities and aptitude.
- Be wary of falling into gender-based assumptions about who might be most suited to different kinds of roles.
- Think about the location of the interview. Provide an environment in which candidates can comfortably ask questions about flexible work hours, pay conditions and so forth.

Have a clear employment agreement

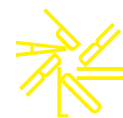
A clear letter of offer and employment agreement is vital to good employee management and business practice.

- Make sure the letter of offer and employment agreement clearly outlines the position as discussed in the interview and subsequent negotiations. This should include a clear understanding of any flexible work arrangements.
- Employment contracts should comply with the *Fair Work Act 2009*, including the *National Employment Standards*, the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993* and relevant Awards.

Support the new recruit

The appointment of the successful candidate is just the start of their integration into a practice. Successful hiring depends as much on what happens after a choice is made as it does on the selection process.

- Develop a plan for how best to manage and support the new recruit in their new role.
- Remember that everyone needs time to adjust to a new role, to figure out how to adapt to a new environment, and to establish effective working relationships with colleagues.
- Provide adequate support during this transition. It is well worth the effort for future gains in commitment and productivity.



Consider targets or quotas

If you realise you have a gender balance problem, but can't seem to deal with it effectively, consider putting targets or quotas in place. These can help practice management to focus on the issue, and encourage them to act and think inventively about how to address it.

Targets give you a clear aim, while quotas are a technique of last resort, which can force cultural change when used effectively.

- Targets or quotas can force you to think laterally about what kind of person would be appropriate for the job and where you might find them – using all of the techniques suggested earlier.
- It is a mistake to think that targets or quotas will result in you hiring lesser-qualified candidates. There are many, many talented and skilled women out there, and you may be surprised by what they bring to the office when given the opportunity.
- Meet your targets by appointing women to all levels of the practice, not just to junior roles.
- Don't treat targets or quotas as a box-ticking exercise. If you do, it will be obvious to all, will do nothing to address the issues and will open your practice up to cynicism and derision.
- See *Parlour guide: Leadership* for more on quotas.

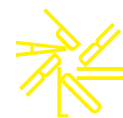
Employees

Job-hunting in a slow economic environments is a tricky business and potential employees need to be well prepared. Many of the suggestions that follow are relevant to most job-seekers, but given the biases within the system women are advised to strategise particularly carefully. (Much as we want to simply fix the system, this will take time.)

Spread your net wide

When looking for job opportunities make sure you think broadly about where you might find a new job, and what kind of job and practice or organisation could be the one for you. Remember that many architectural jobs are not advertised and are filled via word-of-mouth, personal recommendation or unsolicited portfolios. Use your contacts and networks to help find opportunities and spend time to develop and extend these networks – they will be useful in all kinds of ways throughout your career.

- Use your peers and colleagues. Ask peers, mentors and educators to suggest some names that you could contact directly with your CV and portfolio or, if appropriate, to introduce you to potential employers.
- Use social media and online professional networking sites to extend your networks, and to visualise your existing ones.
- Don't forget traditional networking methods – attend industry events, ask questions in public forums, and explore ways to get to know professional peers.
- Think laterally about where you look for job advertisements. For example, an increasing number of practices are posting jobs on social media such as twitter and Instagram.



Be strategic and open-minded

Developing a career involves thought and planning. Be strategic about this – in particular do your homework on practices – but be open-minded, too.

- Remember, you won't always find the 'perfect' job at the right time. But sometimes the job that appears less-than-ideal turns out to offer unexpected opportunities.
 - Think about your career strategically. What might the less-than-ideal job offer you at a moment in time? Can it add to your range of skills and experience? Will it help set you up for the next position? Will the benefits outweigh the disadvantages for a defined period? Remember that short-term positions doing less interesting work may lead to long-term opportunities.
 - Be aware that you might find interesting work in unexpected places.
 - Remember, firms may be open to hiring outside their existing demographic – avoid unnecessarily limiting yourself by not applying.
 - Conversely, do your homework. Find out what the culture of the office is – you might love the work produced, but hate going to the office. Then decide if it is worth it at this particular stage in your career.
- See Parlour guide: **Career progression**.

Be prepared

Preparation is essential for both the application and the interview. Find out as much as you can about the role and practice and tailor your application in response. Don't just fire off another form letter. Make sure you are informed for any interview.

- Carefully present your work, experience, skills and credentials in relation to the position. If you are sending in an unsolicited portfolio, make sure you demonstrate knowledge of the practice you are contacting.

- Proofread your application. A poorly written document, with typos and other spelling mistakes can be all it takes to tip you out of the 'interview' pile.
 - Address your application properly. 'Dear sir' is not always a good start.
 - Interviews usually end with 'do you have any questions?'. Plan ahead with relevant questions. (See 'Make the interview work for you' for some suggestions.)
 - If you need to negotiate a non-standard work situation, be well prepared with ideas about how it could work, where you have room to move, and what is an absolute necessity.
- See the Parlour guides: **Negotiation**, **Part-time work** and **Flexibility**.

Be clear about what you bring

An employer wants to know about your skills and experience, but they are also interested in other qualities and knowledge you may bring. This is especially important for those with atypical or non-traditional career paths.

- Frame your application and interview in terms of what you can bring the company, not just what the company can do for you. This might sound obvious, but a common complaint from many employers.
- If you have had an atypical career, make sure you can articulate the benefits and strengths that go with this. Be clear and convincing about what extra knowledge and skills you bring as a result – for example, are you focused, efficient and excellent at time-management?
- Don't be apologetic about the way your career has developed.



Make the interview work for you

Be clear about what you can bring to a company, but also use the interview to find out more about a firm and its culture. Does the practice have a plan for development and progression or will you be filling the same gap indefinitely? Does the practice culture and (un)willingness to mentor match your ambitions and aspirations?

- Ask questions. These could include:
What projects will I work on? What will be my role in the project team, including my levels of responsibility? What role does the practice have for me in the next two, three, five years? Are flexible work hours available for study, teaching, travel, children and other family commitments? Are there mentor schemes? Is continuing professional development encouraged? How? Does the practice belong to any professional associations? What are the usual working hours? Is regular overtime expected?
- Be confident. Don't be self-effacing or downplay your skills, knowledge and experience.
- Don't be afraid to negotiate.
 - See *Parlour guide: Negotiation*.

Check the written offer

Get everything down on paper. This is particularly important if you have negotiated a flexible work situation, or other non-traditional arrangement.

- Check that the letter of offer and employment agreement accords with your understanding of the position and with matters discussed in the interview and subsequent negotiations.
- Be informed about your rights as an employee. Employment contracts should comply with relevant legislation. At the time of writing this includes the *Fair Work Act 2009*, the *National Employment Standards*, the *Minimum Conditions of Employment Act 1993* and relevant Awards.

Rights and responsibilities

Employers and employees each have rights and responsibilities under the *Fair Work Act 2009*, the federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and state-based legislation.

Even if your business is exempt from state anti-discrimination laws (for example, on the basis of size), the federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* applies Australia wide.

Under the Act, it's illegal to discriminate on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy (presumed or otherwise). The Act also applies where a job is located internationally but advertised within Australia.

Gender-neutral language in job advertisements is also a legal requirement under the Sex Discrimination Act. Breaching the Act can incur fines of \$1,000 or more.

Note: This is offered as an overview only. Readers are reminded that legislation may change and they are advised to check current legislation at the time of reading.



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. Full credits can be found in the introduction to the guides. The guides are published with the support of the Melbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne.

Disclaimer

The Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice are offered as a guide and overview only. They may be of assistance to individuals, practices and organisations, but the authors, Parlour, the University of Queensland and University of Melbourne exclude, to the extent permitted by law, all warranties, express or implied, including without limitation warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular use, safety or quality in relation to the use of the information contained in this publication, and disclaim all liability for any loss no matter how incurred, which might arise from relying upon the information contained in this publication. Individuals and practices should seek advice regarding employment and human resources policy and particular situations from their legal, HR or other business adviser as appropriate.

Copyright

© 2014, Parlour, University of Melbourne and University of Queensland. You are permitted to download, display, print and reproduce this material in an unaltered form only for your personal, non-commercial use or for use within your organisation. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved.

Further resources

Gender Composition of the Workforce: Recruitment and Selection

Workplace Gender Equity Agency

http://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/GE1.1_selection_recruitment_tag.pdf

Gender Composition of the Workforce: Management Commitment

Workplace Gender Equity Agency

http://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/GE1.2.2_management_commitment.pdf

Best Practice Guidelines for Recruitment and Selection

Australian Human Rights Commission

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/best-practice-guidelines-recruitment-and-selection>

A Guide to Hiring New Employees

Fair Work Ombudsman

<http://www.fairwork.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/2219/guide-to-hiring-new-employees.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>

ACA HR Policy Templates

Association of Consulting Architects

<http://aca.org.au/article/hr-policy-templates>

Further reading

'In Search of a Less Sexist Hiring Process'

Avivah Wittenberg-Cox, HBR Blog

<http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/03/in-search-of-a-less-sexist-hiring-process/>

'Equity and the Interview'

Kirsty Volz, Parlour, 2014

<http://www.archiparlour.org/equity-the-interview/>

www.archiparlour.org



msd

Melbourne School of Design

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, BUILDING AND PLANNING

www.msd.unimelb.edu.au



Parlour :
: women, equity, architecture.



Australian Government
Australian Research Council



Australian Institute of Architects

This guide is an outcome of the research project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership' (2011–2014), funded by the Australian Research Council through the Linkage Projects scheme.

Project LP100200107. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Research Council.



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA