

# Evaluation of the Gender Equality in Victorian Sport and Recreation Program Design Principles

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The exclusionary capacity of sport is well documented, with critiques illustrating how certain sports perpetuate hyper-masculine norms that work to exclude other gender identities. Whilst gender inequality within sport is well documented, sport remains a significant cultural arena within the Australian psyche and potentially a space where dominant and damaging forms of masculinity, such as those linked to violence, can be contested and challenged. As such, sport has been identified by policy makers, organisations and practitioners as an important site to deploy education, initiatives and programs that seek to influence culture change as a way of contributing to gender-based violence primary prevention strategies.

In December 2016, the Victorian Government released 'Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy'. This was used to foster work with State Sporting Associations, Regional Sports Assemblies and other partners to pilot 10 projects within sports settings seeking to promote gender equality and the primary prevention of violence against women. These projects were tasked with implementing a series of Design Principles developed by researchers from La Trobe and Swinburne universities, to address gender inequality, contribute to primary prevention of violence against women and ultimately drive culture change within the sport sector.

In February 2020, researchers within the Faculty of Education, Monash University were commissioned by Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) to undertake an evaluation of how nine (9) of the funded projects had utilised the Design Principles within their work.

The evaluation was guided by the following research questions:

**RESEARCH QUESTION 1:** How have the nine projects sought to implement the Design Principles and what have been the key enablers and barriers to this process?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2:** What best practice examples exist illustrating how the Design Principles have been successfully implemented to facilitate positive change in sporting environments?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 3:** What adjustments and refinements should be made to improve the Design Principles?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 4:** What theories of change explain how operationalising the Design Principles will lead to greater levels of gender equality and reduction of violence against women in sport settings?

**RESEARCH QUESTION 5:** How can this change be evaluated across projects?

# Methodology

To collect data to respond to RESEARCH QUESTION 1-3, face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual project coordinators, project managers and other stakeholders the project leaders considered were relevant to implementation. In total 12 interviews were conducted, these were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed in full. After each interview, the research team developed detailed notes, particularly highlighting best practice examples in relation to the enactment of the Design Principles. The interview transcripts and field notes were collated and thematically analysed using the research questions as a framework to guide this process.

For RESEARCH QUESTION 4-5 the research team used interview data and an analysis of project plans to understand the intentions of projects and how staff perceived their work would facilitate change in the various contexts. From this the research team conducted a review of relevant theories of change and considered the implications for this on evaluation design across the projects. The findings of this aspect of the research were communicated in a community of practice delivered by the research team in April, 2020.

## Findings

### Research Question 1

**How have the 9 projects sought to implement the Design Principles and what have been the key enablers and barriers to this process?**

The projects have engaged with the Design Principles in the initial development of their projects to varying degrees. It is important to note, however, that only 3 projects had utilised the Design Principles prior to developing their project. The remaining projects had some knowledge of the Design Principles document but had not used it to guide their practice and subsequent work with stakeholders in any significant way.

#### KEY BARRIERS

**Project leadership uncertainties: Lack of engagement with Design Principles by project staff**

A number of project staff who had considerable experience in the women's health sector had not engaged with the design principles because they felt they were too basic for their needs. However for others in the sport sector with limited experience, the Design Principles were considered to be too vague and they were unsure how to operationalise them. This points to a need to consider the audience that the Design Principles are aimed at and adjust accordingly.

**Project leadership uncertainties: Time required for culture change**

All projects recognised that systemic change within the sport sector would take a sustained period of time and require ongoing work with key stakeholders and clubs. The relatively short time span of the projects, a 9-month delivery period, was not felt to be long enough to fully implement the practices advocated within the Design Principles and achieve any significant or sustainable change. The gap in funding and the uncertainty surrounding potential further funding had resulted in them losing momentum and for some, led to them having to essentially restart and rebuild relationships.

### **Organisational complexity/Threats to culture: Working with the voluntary sector and overcoming resistance**

A further general challenge was the difficulties of influencing change within the voluntary sports sector and amongst volunteers whose time and resources were already stretched from the day to day running of their clubs and competitive priorities. Some projects encountered considerable resistance from a small number of very reluctant club leaders and members. The short time frame and the challenges of working with volunteers had led many project officers to focus on what they described as 'quick wins' to help build the confidence of volunteers and allow them to feel that they were making progress.

### **Threats to culture: Moving beyond gender equality and engaging with prevention of gender-based violence**

A number of project staff discussed at length the challenges they had in pushing stakeholders to move beyond a focus on gender equality to actively engaging with violence against women and their role in prevention strategies. Many of the projects outlined how they had met considerable resistance when they had attempted to facilitate activities, such as educational sessions and bystander action training, that were initially seeking to raise awareness of violence against women and the role that sport could play in prevention. Consequently, many project staff reframed their projects solely around gender equality with the assumption that this would lead to the development of attitudes and practices that support the prevention of violence against women. Whilst this can occur, a specific focus on prevention of violence is required to drive this focus and encourage stakeholders to engage with the issues once initial gender equality work has been undertaken.

### **Threats to culture: Lack of engagement with men within the Design Principles document**

A further issue raised by project staff was the lack of focus within the Design Principles document on men and masculinity and the relationship between certain forms of masculinity, gender inequality and gender-based violence. The lack of focus on working with men and critiquing dominant forms of masculinity within the Design Principles potentially leads to projects ignoring a fundamental driver of gender inequality and gender-based violence.

### **Unknown Current/Future State: Challenges of encouraging clubs/sports association to see the need for change**

A number of project staff discussed the challenges of encouraging clubs and associations to consider firstly that gender equality was an issue within their organisations, and secondly that change was required.

## **KEY ENABLERS**

### **Process Enablers: Funding, education and evaluation**

Of most importance was the funding provided to projects, which enabled the employment of dedicated staff who had the resources and expertise to drive the projects forward. Using experts to deliver education was perceived important for credibility, however finding suitable experts was not without its challenges. Projects identified initial elements of evaluation, such as conducting audits, were useful in generating conversations, assisting in raising awareness of gender inequality and identifying where resources needed to be targeted.

### **Strategic Enablers: Engaging key influencers and champions and emphasising the business case**

Project staff suggested engaging key influencers within their projects, as advocated by the Design Principle 'Build on Strengths' was an important enabler. Connected to this, being able to present a compelling business case for the importance of gender equality assisted within engaging voluntary clubs and getting key leaders and committees on board. This was again advocated in the principle 'Establish a business case'.

### **Alignment Enabler – Previous experience/expertise in gender equality work and previous partnerships**

A further important enabler for the projects was the existing experience of staff within lead organisations at developing gender equality focused projects. There was, therefore, some institutional commitment and also a familiarity with this type of work, with the funding enabling them to develop and extend existing work further.

### **Interpersonal enablers: Importance of flexibility and creating connections**

All projects discussed a key enabler was the ability of project staff and the project framework to be flexible and respond to local needs. Developing relationships between project staff, sport association staff and club volunteers was another important enabler and was a necessary springboard for project work.

### **Unanticipated enablers: Organisational change and increased knowledge**

Several stakeholders suggested that the projects had prompted them to reflect on the practices within their own organisation and recognise the need for change to ensure that they also were promoting gender equality and could model this process for clubs and associations.

## **Research Question 2**

### **What best practice examples exist illustrating how the Design Principles have been successfully implemented to facilitate positive change in sporting environments?**

One of the considerations in examining best practice examples, was whether particular models of delivery were more effective in supporting project outcomes than others. We would not suggest that there is an 'ideal' model or lead organisation type for future projects.

Examples of best practice in relation to each Design Principle are documented in full in the report.

## **Research Question 3**

### **What adjustments and refinements should be made to improve the Design Principles?**

Based on analysis above, discussions with SRV staff and the research teams' review of the Design Principles, we would recommend the following refinements to the Design Principles document:

1. CLARIFY TARGET AUDIENCE: Greater clarity is required around who the Design Principles are targeting to enact change.

2. **INFORM PROJECT PLANS:** For the Design Principles to be a working document, greater emphasis needs to be placed on them in informing project design from the outset, including how they inform initial project plans, through to reporting frameworks and monitoring and evaluation.
3. **CENTRALISE SOCIOECOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS:** The context for this project work is complex and multi-layered, requiring a strong social change focus. Given that it is important for projects to utilise a socioecological approach in their work to facilitate change, it may be valuable to organise the principles to illustrate how enacting them will influence change across socioecological levels.
4. **TRANSLATING IDEAS TO ACTION:** Ideally, a revised Design Principles document needs to contain the key principles, but also a section of how to translate these into tangible actions.
5. **ROLE OF MEN:** The Design Principles need to explicitly consider the role of men in contributing to gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence. In their current form, the principles can encourage a focus on working with women to 'fix' the problem rather than addressing the structural inequalities inherent within patriarchal systems.
6. **ACKNOWLEDGE RESISTANCE:** All projects repeatedly emphasised the challenges and resistance they encountered undertaking gender equality work and this needs to be recognised within the Design Principles and strategies/case studies and/or education for overcoming resistance documented.
7. **COMPLEX CONTENT:** It would be valuable to acknowledge the challenges specifically of undertaking gender-based violence prevention work and particularly provide strategies and examples of how projects could move towards this focus as they develop.
8. **LANGUAGE:** There are a number of language changes that would be valuable to revisit and make within the document. The title ideally should indicate that the Design Principles are seeking to develop practices that contribute to the prevention of violence. We would also suggest adopting gender-based violence, rather than violence against women as terminology throughout the document. Using this terminology enables men to be more readily integrated into the dialogue within projects, as advocated within recommendation #5 and furthermore removes the notion of a gender binary and encourages considerations of intersectionality and violence. Similarly, we suggest using gender equity rather than equality, within the document.
9. **EVALUATION:** The Design Principles emphasise the importance of evaluation in informing and developing project work, but it would be useful to stress the importance of pre and post intervention data collection to measure change effectively and ensure alignment of their evaluation framework with the Design Principles.
10. **BUILD A COMMUNITY:** In addition to the Design Principles document, the evaluation suggests that whatever the level of expertise of the project team, they value and benefit from opportunities to share their experiences and problem solve challenges through communities of practice and access to ongoing education.

Beyond the development of the Design Principles, the evaluation has pointed to a number of actions that the State Government could take a lead in developing that would assist in strengthening future gender equity in sport work. These include:

- There is a general lack of awareness in the community sport sector that gender

equity is an issue. The State Government could play a role in raising awareness generally of the issue of gender inequity in community sport through an awareness and marketing campaign. This would allow projects to leverage off this and be able to move straight to actions with community sport partners on addressing inequity rather than having to provide education around the problem. It is important to have staff within State Government capable of driving this broader awareness raising of gender inequity within sport.

- The evaluation additionally illustrated a general lack of capacity and knowledge within the sports sector to undertake gender equity and gender-based violence focused work necessary for driving change. The State Government could potentially play a key role in driving and supporting the upskilling of professionals within the sport sector to raise awareness and capacity to address gender inequity within their work.
- The State Government could potentially play a stronger role in influencing engagement with gender equity and gender-based violence within the community sector by ensuring that funding is only allocated to community partners that demonstrate a full commitment to gender equity work. Ideally the State Government would also provide an overarching framework that projects commit to, stating clear outcomes for the projects which will allow the collection of consistent and robust evaluation data enabling clearer judgements of project success and best practice approaches to addressing gender inequity and gender-based violence. Having staff with expertise of gender equity and gender-based violence within state government, capable of overseeing and managing the development of plans, alignment with key outcomes and supporting ongoing delivery is important if this approach is adopted.

## Research Question 4

**What theories of change explain how operationalising the Design Principles will lead to greater levels of gender equality and reduction of violence against women in sport settings?**

A socio-ecological approach, combined with feminist theory highlights the multi-faceted drivers of inequality and violence that interplay across a range of personal, situational, socio-cultural, environmental and institutional factors. Common across each level and strategies for change is the need to alter current gender-based norms that allow gender inequality and gender-based violence to be justified and reproduced.

Social norm theory (Raymond et al., 2014) would suggest that this needs to occur through two strategies, *normative reframing* and *normative innovation*. These strategies initially require a recognition of existing problematic norms, including highlighting the negative influence these norms have on an organisation, community and individual. Once existing norms are contested, alternative institutional rules and norms need to be offered that address power imbalances, negative discourses and taken for granted assumptions. *Normative innovation* requires the changing of norms and the creation of new rules of behaviour to replace negative norms and reinforcing of positive ones.

Gender transformative approaches recognise that changing gender norms requires strategies at each level of the socio-ecological model and attempt to change the system rather than make gender accommodations that do little to conflict with existing power dynamics. By operationalising the Design Principles, particularly with the revisions suggested, projects will develop more socio-ecologically informed approaches that focus on challenging gender norms at multiple levels. This more systemic change has greater potential to positively impact gender equity and prevent gender-based violence.



## Research Question 5

### How can this change be evaluated across projects?

With significant investments in time and money, and with such an important outcome at stake, it is essential that projects are evaluated for their effectiveness to achieve the broad outcomes identified as a priority for funding. Projects have collected data to varying levels and as such there is limited robust evidence documenting their impact. In improving evaluation moving forward, it is important to note that there is no known single approach or strategy that produces systemic change across sporting contexts. Consequently, data needs to be gathered on 'what works' and just as importantly, 'what doesn't', across a range of approaches and strategies being trialled in the field across varied settings. In order to make comparisons across projects, an agreed set of outcomes and a consistent or comparable (not necessarily identical) set of measures need to be applied across all projects. Careful documentation of the different processes undertaken is needed so we can learn what intervention strategies produced what changes. Even if two projects were successful, one may have been significantly more cost effective or impactful than the other. The following recommendations are made to strengthen the evaluation process in future projects.

- In consultation with the applicants, the funding body has a role to play in negotiating an agreed set of outcomes across all projects and identifying the measures most suitable to capture evidence of their effectiveness. This will allow collection of coherent and comparable data from which to make assessments.
- Evaluation needs to be embedded within project practice from the outset. Effective data collection and analysis at a programmatic level requires a specialised skill set and knowledge base.
- For evaluation to measure change effectively projects need to be informed by sound logic models that clearly document objectives, expected changes, strategies for facilitating change, and an outline of what change will look like in the short, medium and long term.
- Greater support and education could be usefully provided during the application and planning process to ensure that objectives, strategies and outcomes align with the proposed theories of change and that objectives as well as measurement tools are appropriate.
- In order to effectively evaluate change as a consequence of an intervention, it is necessary to collect evaluation data pre- and post-project intervention, using evaluation tools sensitive enough to capture real change. The process of outcome evaluation might be better managed more centrally by those who have greater capacity to measure change over time. Certainly, the funding agency should take an active role in establishing how effective their spending has been in relation to the outcomes of the project.

## Conclusions

The gender equality in sport project is important and necessary for facilitating change within the sport sector. The focus of such work needs to be ongoing and properly resourced to prompt the culture change that is required if sports are to fully embrace gender equity and be

a context for primary prevention of gender-based violence. Continued investment, both funding and human resources, is required to encourage efforts to move beyond surface level changes that are unsustainable once funding ceases.

Whilst the Design Principles were not widely used by the projects, the evaluation has illustrated that much of the work undertaken by projects aligns with the principles and they provide a relevant framework for supporting gender equity work in the community sport sector. A number of suggestions for changes have been outlined in the report which will enhance the value of the principles for guiding future work.

The evaluation has highlighted a range of barriers and enablers that projects have encountered in enacting the Design Principles. Key barriers and challenges have included funding and resource constraints created by the short time frame of the project and unconfirmed funding moving forward, lack of knowledge and understanding of gender equality within the voluntary sport sector, the time it has taken to develop a relationship and rapport with volunteers and sport association staff and resistance at a community sport level to considering that gender equality work is needed and necessary. Furthermore, projects have struggled to move action beyond supporting gender equality to the broader issue of gender-based violence. Key enablers have included the expertise of project staff, the ability to develop partnerships with relevant organisations to extend expertise, engagement of key authority figures to prompt change and the capacity of project staff to be flexible and adapt to meet the needs of local clubs and associations.

Discussions with project staff and an overview of the project documentation illustrates that the project is underpinned by theories associated with gender transformation utilising a socioecological approach. It is important moving forward to build a body of evidence to establish the impact of projects and what approaches are effective in disrupting damaging gender norms within community sport. To do this effectively, evaluation needs to be embedded from the outset and projects require support in the development of their project plan to ensure they are developing appropriate and measurable objectives and their strategies for change align with the proposed objectives.

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