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Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

Women in Fire Management

Action Plan 2019–22





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Vision

A fire management workforce that demonstrates behaviours, attitudes and skills that support diversity and inclusion.

Purpose

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) is committed to increasing gender diversity in its workforce, particularly in our fire management business where the number of women involved has been traditionally low.

This plan describes the objectives, priorities and actions to help achieve the vision.

Values

The department is committed to removing barriers to ensure the full participation of everyone, and effecting positive cultural change, to create an environment that is innovative, inclusive, productive, fair and positive.

Greater diversity assists in developing a stronger, more flexible and innovative workforce, resulting in better outcomes.

The department will strive to achieve greater diversity based on individual talent regardless of gender. Promotion will be based on merit and it is anticipated that the flow-on effects of this plan will have benefits for all individuals involved in fire management.

Context

A key priority for the department, as set out in the Strategic Directions 2018-21, is building a valued, collaborative and respectful workforce with a focus on diversity. A critical component of this is ensuring equal opportunity in the workplace with a focus on diversity and inclusion, as well as providing development opportunities and training for staff so they can perform, innovate and contribute to strategic priorities.

This Action Plan underpins the Workforce and Diversity Plan (WFDP) which sets the strategic agenda for achieving our current and future workforce needs, provides for a diverse workforce and meets statutory requirements. The Action Plan has been developed by Regional and Fire Management Services Division (RFMSD) in consultation with the Diversity and Access Committee (DAC) to improve gender diversity in fire management, with the goal of increasing the number of women in fire and leadership roles.

A new Workforce and Diversity Plan is currently in development and the initiatives detailed within this Action Plan will be delivered in conjunction with, and be complementary to the overall WFDP.

Identified challenges

- **17 per cent** of fire management positions are held by women
- **Five per cent** of front-line fire fighter positions are held by women
- **Only four per cent** of fire duty officer positions are held by women
- There are **no women above a level 4** classification in permanent fire management positions in districts and regions
- There are **no women in permanent AWU Overseer positions**



The need for action

Statistics relating to gender across the department are more balanced in some business areas than others, however in Regional and Fire Management Services Division, the number of women make up just 35 per cent and when broken down further into fire management roles and positions the disparity is clear with only 17 per cent of dedicated Public Service Award (PSA) fire positions and 5 per cent of Australian Workers Union (AWU) positions held by women.

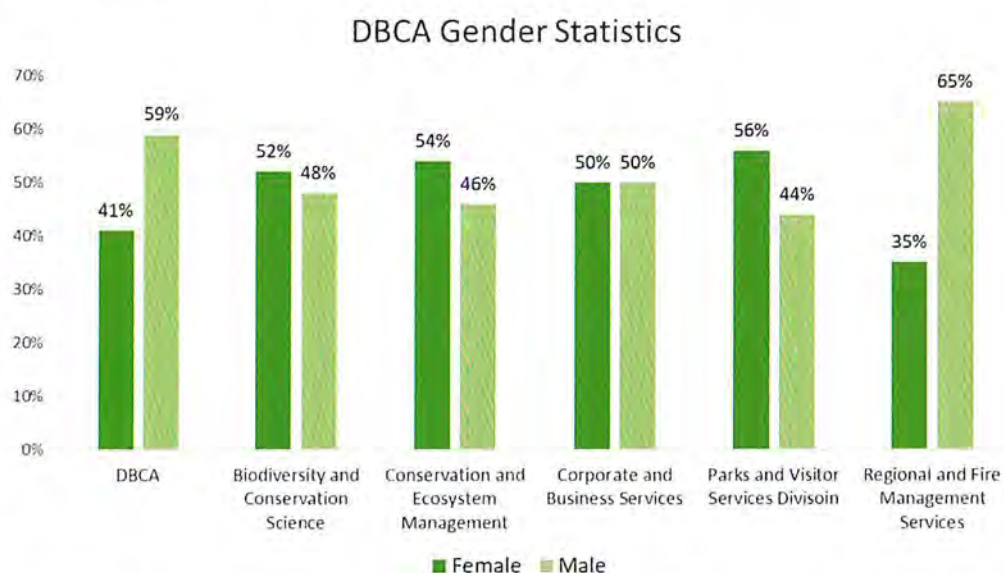


Figure 1. Gender Statistics broken down by departmental business areas as of May 2018

Table 1. Fire roles and positions broken down by gender

Fire Role/Position	Female	Male
PSA Fire Positions	17%	83%
AWU Positions	5%	95%
Seasonal Conservation Employees	6%	94%
District Duty Officer/Regional Duty Officer/State Duty Officer	4%	96%
Employees receiving FLA (Bushfire)	12%	88%
Employees receiving FLA (Prescribed Burning)	14%	86%
Employees receiving FA (PSA/RAGA only)	31%	69%

Of the PSA positions, there are no women in permanent fire leadership positions such as District Fire Coordinators and Regional Leaders Fire Management, which equates to no women above Level 4 in a permanent fire management position in any district or region. In Fire Management Services Branch there is only one female above Level 5. Similarly, there are also no women in permanent AWU Overseer positions.

There are also differences in the types of roles that men and women are performing. Table 2 below sets out the unit leader roles in the pre-formed teams. Not only are women underrepresented in leadership roles, but there is bias in the types of roles undertaken by men and women, with men being involved in operational and leadership roles and women involved in the more administrative type roles such as management support and resources.

Table 2. PFT unit leader roles and gender breakdown

Role	Male	Female
Incident Controller	100%	0%
Operations Section Leader	100%	0%
Plans Unit Leader	80%	20%
Public Information Section Leader	100%	0%
Logistics Section Leader	100%	0%
Planning Section Leader	100%	0%
Management Support Unit Leader	0%	100%
Supply Unit Leader	100%	0%
Facilities Unit Leader	100%	0%
Finance Unit Leader	20%	80%
Resources Unit Leader	25%	75%
Intelligence Unit Leader	100%	0%
Catering Unit Leader	75%	25%

Principles for success for improved employee satisfaction within fire management roles

- Equal opportunities for all who are capable and strive to progress their career in fire management
- Increase in awareness and use of flexible working arrangements in fire management
- Champions of Change are visible at all levels of the agency
- Staff are empowered to counter negative behaviours that hinder achieving gender diversity in fire management
- Increase in the number of women applying for and being successfully appointed to fire positions
- Increased participation of women in fire management roles across the agency
- Balanced gender representation at meetings and forums

How the Plan was developed

This Action Plan was developed through wide consultation with departmental employees including feedback processes, research, and discussions with similar organisations across Australia already on the journey to improving their gender diversity.

In February 2018, a Gender Diversity in Fire Working Group was established to develop the action plan and associated processes. The working group included representatives from across the department. In March 2018, a survey was distributed to staff who are involved in fire management roles in a fulltime capacity, on occasion or not at all. The survey was undertaken to better understand why the number of women in fire was underrepresented and what issues, perceptions, biases, and barriers were contributing to this imbalance.

Following the survey, two workshops were held on 9 and 16 May 2018 with over 50 staff participating. The workshops provided a forum to share the survey findings and discuss potential themes and leverage off the collective experience of participants to develop strategies for inclusion in the plan.

Both the survey and the workshops provided forums to share experiences and workable solutions to facilitate change.

Survey results

Of the 401 respondents, 50 per cent were female, and 49 per cent were male. Of those that were currently not involved in fire, 57 per cent of women said they would like to be, compared to 33 per cent of men. The top three reasons for not being involved in fire management roles included family/personal commitments, it wasn't a requirement of current duties and individuals were concerned how it will impact their everyday job.

Key findings

- 32 per cent of female respondents concerned over impacts of taking maternity leave when in a fire management role/position
- 72 per cent of operational women surveyed felt that they had faced barriers in taking on fire leadership roles
- 43 per cent of women overall and 56 per cent of operational women disagreed that employees were encouraged to report incidences of gender discrimination compared with 9 per cent of men
- 88 per cent of females surveyed strongly agreed to an improved mentoring system in fire management.

Identified barriers

- Allocation of roles typically based on gender
- Competitive disadvantage based on lack of operational experience
- Perception that men make better leaders than women
- Lack of work life balance within fire management
- The department does not encourage a healthy work-life balance
- Managers supporting women in fire leadership roles or senior positions
- Lack of flexibility in fire rostering and working arrangements
- A bias of women often being targeted for office roles early in career and not gaining experience as quickly as men
- Historical unequal promotional opportunities; positions in fire management awarded to men and not advertised; acting opportunities are offered to men more often than women resulting in men being more competitive when a job arises
- Insufficient training/mentoring for women; lack of training to perform confidently in operational or more senior roles
- Women working part time are not taken seriously by a large percentage of fire managers
- Perception that fire management roles are a man's job
- A perception that women don't want the roles to begin with and are not capable of fulfilling a fire leadership role or a general bias on what roles they can and can't undertake especially in the crews on the trucks
- Lack of communication and clarity regarding ways to progress, training opportunities and approachability of managers



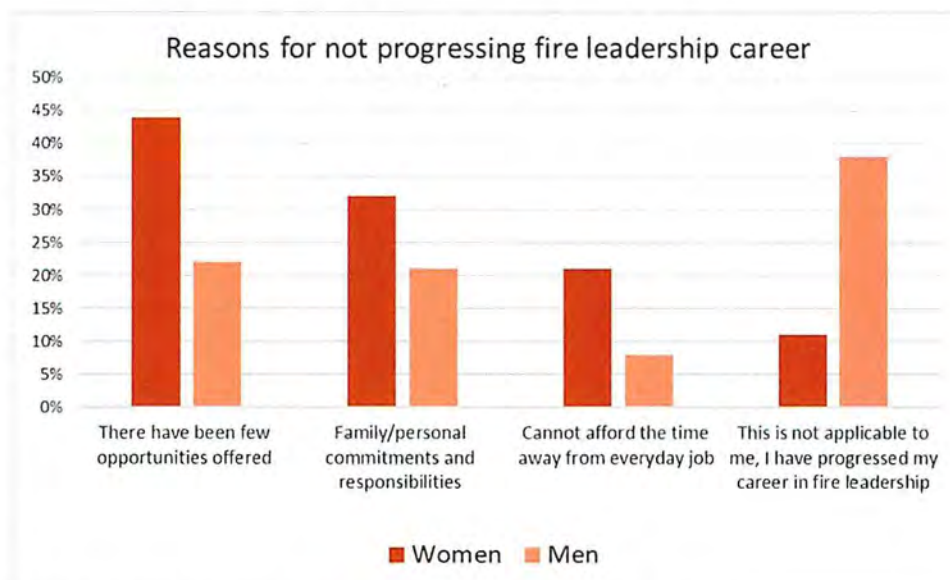


Figure 2: Reasons for not progressing a career in fire leadership

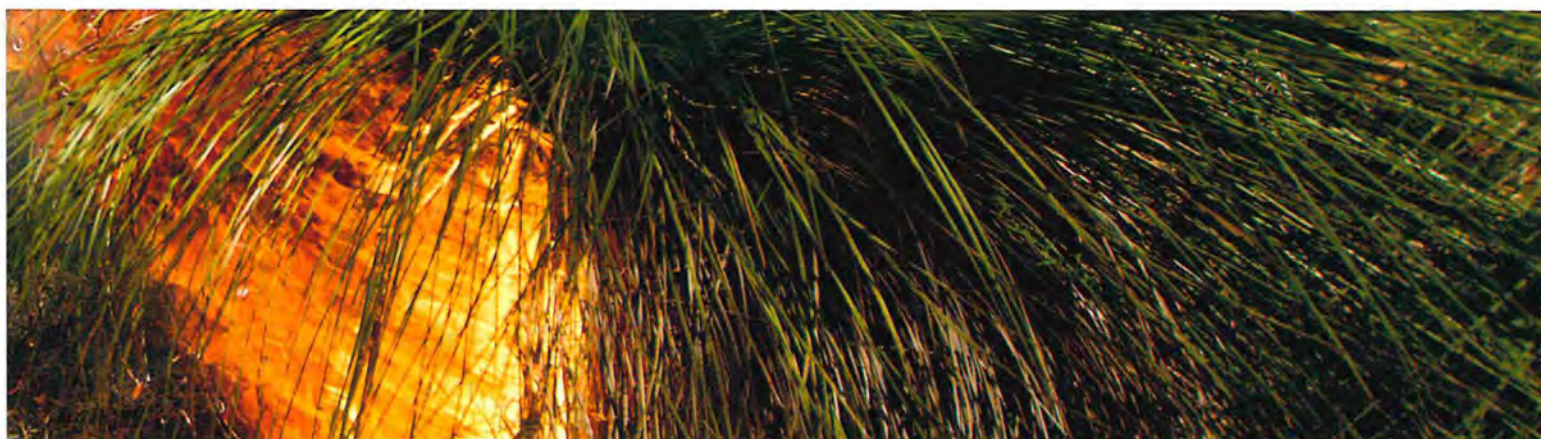
Recommendations

There are six areas for improving gender diversity in fire management within department:

1. Building an inclusive workforce;
2. Flexible work arrangements;
3. Building confidence;
4. Staying connected;
5. Continual improvement; and
6. Recruitment.

Building an inclusive workforce

The department will strive to build a workforce that demonstrates behaviours, attitudes and skills that support diversity and inclusion. It is recognised that staff perform better when they feel they are valued and supported. Staff must feel empowered with the training and confidence to counter discriminatory behaviour. Accessibility to information must be shared across all staff.





Flexible work arrangements

Flexible working arrangements create benefits at both the individual level and at a departmental level. Such arrangements provide for motivation, productivity, fostering better work-life balance and increasing participation in rosters. The department needs to share stories where flexible working arrangements are successful, and senior leaders need to lead by example in the uptake of flexible work arrangements themselves. Innovation and flexibility around roster sharing, deployment lengths at fires and during prescribed burning operations, will increase involvement of individuals in fire management, especially for those who are part-time or have family and personal commitments.

Building confidence

The department can increase individuals' confidence to develop their careers through the establishment of programs and initiatives that promote supportive networks. Mentoring and networking promote connectivity which in turn, increases confidence in speaking up, sharing stories, stepping-up, decision-making and proposing new and diverse ideas. Focussing on the career development of individuals, particularly those areas of fire management that are often harder to stay current in, will allow more women to assimilate back into roles after any discontinuity of service. Personal development is a shared responsibility that needs to be driven by self-directed learning and also corporately supported.

Staying connected

The department will promote an inclusive environment whereby discontinuity of service for extended leave does not impede career advancement or networking opportunities. It is critical to ensure that those on leave for any reason are not isolated from opportunities. Information such as training, acting or promotional opportunities, forums, changes in structures and reporting should be communicated and available to all, regardless of their leave status. Promotion of 'keeping in touch' strategies will result in individuals feeling connected, informed, and therefore valued.

Continual improvement

The department will commit to ongoing efforts to improve diversity in fire management and promote this area as a rewarding career for everyone. Succession planning for fire roles and positions will provide a pipeline of talent for continuity of business. Gender diversity considerations can and should be built into this for our future leaders.

Recruitment

In order to attract and retain a diverse range of talent to fire management, the department will concentrate on its recruitment strategies and the image it presents internally and externally to the public about its business. Fire management is a rewarding career with many facets for learning and avenues for development. However, there is a perception that fighting fires on the frontline is where it stops, and that these roles are traditionally performed by men. In order to improve diversity in fire management and make the fire business more attractive, the department will showcase more of their own women involved in fire management, through promotional material on videos, social media, photos, flyers, job adverts and recruitment campaigns. Additionally, recruitment targets will improve the gender profile in fire management and along with other initiatives will assist to attract, recruit and retain more women. Targets drive change by focusing attention, making departments accountable and communicating commitment.

Action Plan

A three-year action plan has been developed to improve gender diversity in fire management in the department. This plan addresses the identified issues that have led to the current situation and it articulates some short and long-term goals to ensure that the department's fire management business is more inclusive, supportive and the most productive it can be.

Targets

The department recognises the challenges ahead in increasing the representation of women in fire and understands the role that targets play in demonstrating commitment, designating accountability, and focusing attention on the objective. These targets are voluntarily set goals that the agency aspires to over a five-year period. The targets developed are considered fair and reasonable to deliver change but should continue to be driven by merit-based processes.

- 30 per cent women in PSA fire positions by 2024
- 20 per cent women in AWU positions by 2024
- 10 per cent women in fire leadership positions (level 4 and above for PSA and level 3 and above for AWU) in districts/regions by 2024



Table 3. Women in Fire Management Action Plan

Action	Responsible	Timeframe			Status
		2019	2020	2021	
1. Building an inclusive workforce					
A workforce that demonstrates behaviours, attitudes and skills that support diversity and inclusion.					
1.1 Develop and deliver diversity training including unconscious bias training that encourages staff to address discriminatory behaviours	People Services Branch (PSB)				Not yet commenced
Increase awareness of grievance procedures at different levels in the department with the aim of reducing the stigma around reporting problems	PSB				Not yet commenced
1.2 FMSB sessions to provide information to a range of work areas across the department	FMSB				Not yet commenced
1.3 Ensuring access to information on the intranet and via broadcasts for Conservation Employees	OIM and RFMS				Not yet commenced
1.4 Ongoing review of suitability of fire PPE to ensure a range of female sizes and shapes are catered for	PSB, FMSB				Commenced
2. Flexible Work Arrangements					
A work environment that promotes a healthy work-life balance and increases participation in fire management.					
2.1 Promote flexible working practices for men and women to show all staff what is available and encourage staff to take up flexible work arrangements	PSB				Not yet commenced
Share success stories and build a culture that views flexible work practices as a positive initiative	PSB				Not yet commenced
Investigate technologies for assisting with flexible work practices including a system for roster availability and sharing	Workforce Services, FMSB				Commenced
2.2 Review the Fire Service Agreement and industrial considerations including rostering principles, overtime and allowances	Manager FMSB, Manager PSB, Director General				Not yet commenced
2.3 Rostering Flexibility					
Explore roster sharing and shorter deployments to allow for more flexibility	FMSB, Duty Officers, Managers				Not yet commenced
Explore industrial relations relating to roster arrangements and standby detention requirements to encourage work/life balance	Manager FMSB, Manager PSB, Director General				Not yet commenced

Action	Responsible	Timeframe			Status
		2019	2020	2021	
3. Building Confidence					
Establish programs and initiatives that promote supportive networks and increase individuals' confidence to develop their careers.					
3.1 Mentoring					
Develop a mentoring system in fire management to ensure staff are proactively supported in gaining skills and experience to undertake their roles and to ensure managers/mentors are trained to facilitate personnel development conversations	FMSB, Gender Diversity in Fire Working Group				Not yet commenced
3.2 Networking Opportunities					
Commitment to gender diversity on national and international deployments	RFMS				Commenced
Hold memberships, partnerships or have representation on/with organisations that encourage diversity e.g. WAFA, AFAC champions of change	Manager FMSB				Commenced
Facilitate women focussed development and networking opportunities to build confidence through shared experience	RFMS, FMDP				Not yet commenced
3.3 Review of PDPs					
Include a section within the PDP that asks if the individual is interested in fire to promote discussion around career advancement and support in fire management	PSB, FMSB, RFMS and all Parks and Wildlife divisions				Not yet commenced
3.4 Career Development					
Develop a Resource System that adequately captures personnel capability and development needs, that links with incident resource management	Fire Training and Capability Development group				Not yet commenced
Develop a guiding document that maps development pathways for fire management roles	Fire Training and Capability Development group				Commenced
Invest in shadow opportunities for career development and succession planning in leadership positions and roles	FMSB directing, Managers facilitating				Not yet commenced
Promote dual learning opportunities where crew members and IMT members can be interchangeable to share experiences and knowledge outside of their normal fire roles	Local Managers				Not yet commenced

Action	Responsible	Timeframe			Status
		2019	2020	2021	
Identify programs for women in fire management to support speaking up, building confidence and sharing experiences	Gender Diversity in Fire Working Group				Not yet commenced
Make acting opportunities available for part time staff	Managers				Not yet commenced
Managers to ensure women are trained and upskilled early in their careers and then facilitate release from duties as required, without bias for discontinuity of service	Managers, FMDP				Not yet commenced
Managers to ensure there is no role-based gender bias e.g pigeon holes women towards support and administration roles.	Managers, FMDP				Not yet commenced
Increased participation of women in prescribed burning to increase currency of skills, connectivity, confidence and development opportunities	Executive Director RFMS, FMSB Manager, Regional Managers				Not yet commenced
4. Staying Connected An inclusive environment where discontinuity of service does not impede career advancement opportunities.					
4.1 Ensure staff on leave are made aware of acting or promotional opportunities	Managers				Not yet commenced
Promote keeping in touch when on extended leave (LWOP, Maternity, Paternity, Extended, LSL, Out of Season) to share training and development opportunities and establish contact arrangements prior to leave	Managers and PSB				Not yet commenced
5. Continual Improvement Reviews, processes and plans that monitor change, highlight areas for improvement and "future proof" the organisation's productivity and success.					
5.1 Maintain an awareness of research and gender diversity initiatives elsewhere	Gender Diversity in Fire Working Group				Commenced and ongoing
5.2 Review the process of exit interviews with emphasis in identifying lessons learnt regarding fire management	Local Managers for collection and PSB for record keeping				Not yet commenced
5.3 Review the FMDP expenditure priorities to aid in gender diversity and succession planning within fire management	FMDP				Not yet commenced

Action	Responsible	Timeframe			Status
		2019	2020	2021	
5.4 Succession Planning					
Develop regional succession plans for AIMS leadership roles, fire roles, (in particular Duty Officers) and fire positions that consider gender inclusion	RFMSD, Manager FMSB, Regional Managers				Not yet commenced
5.5 Increase representation of female fire trainers/presenters	Training and Capability Unit, FMSB				Not yet commenced
6. Recruitment					
Attracting and retaining a diverse range of talent to the department and advertising fire management as a rewarding career for all.					
6.1 Develop a set of promotional resources for recruitment that showcase more women in fire roles to increase awareness and attractiveness of fire management	PICA and FMSB				Not yet commenced
Pitch promotional resources to schools and universities to promote fire as a career choice	FMDP				Not yet commenced
Review the language used in fire management and regional services position JDFs and job advertisements to ensure they are more inclusive	PSB				Not yet commenced
6.2 Implement a merit-based recruitment process that specifically targets women frontline firefighters (seasonal conservation employees)	District Managers, PSB				Commenced
6.3 Emphasise flexible working practices when advertising fire positions	PSB, RFMSD				Not yet commenced
6.4 Collect, analyse and report on the diversity profile of applications to ensure this information is captured to evaluate effectiveness of recruitment strategies	PSB				Not yet commenced
6.5 Review university recruitment program as part of FMDP to address gender diversity in this process	FMDP				Not yet commenced
6.6 Review FMDP permanent recruitment program to address gender diversity	FMDP				Not yet commenced



Monitoring and Reporting

Fire Management Services branch will evaluate and report on the progress of the Action Plan on an annual basis. Monitoring and communication of results will assist with visibility of improvements over time.

Monitoring:

- The percentage of men and women applying for fire management positions
- The percentage of women and men being appointed in fire management positions
- The number of women being recruited into Conservation Employee positions
- Monitoring and reporting on what roles men and women are carrying out at fire incidents
- Monitoring the percentage of women undertaking Duty Officer roles
- Monitoring the percentage of women undertaking incident management team leadership roles
- Monitoring the percentage of women undertaking AWU leadership positions
- Analysis of the percentage of part time employees involved in fire
- Monitoring of reasons for leaving fire management positions via exit interviews
- Monitoring the uptake of flexible working arrangements



Reporting

A report on progress of the Action Plan will be presented to the Executive Director RFMSD on an annual basis with a copy to Corporate Executive for noting. The report will be made available to all staff. At the end of the three years, a comprehensive overview of the status of the Action Plan including achievements will be undertaken.

Where to from here

The Women in Fire Management Action Plan sets the foundation for achieving diversity in fire management within the department, through actions, monitoring and reporting. Achieving a broader range of diversity will assist in improving organisational productivity, performance, and capability. This plan is one tool to support progression towards achieving greater levels of diversity and in turn improving decision making. The plan will assist in developing practices and processes that attract, develop and retain talent equally in fire roles and positions.

The plan should be used to guide implementation of the actions and encourage ongoing communications on the topics of inclusion and diversity. Leadership commitment and communication will demonstrate the importance of the plan and intended outcomes, encouraging buy-in at all levels, including identifying champions of change. While the actions in this plan are designed to increase the participation of women in fire management, the outcomes will benefit all employees. The department recognises that our ability to undertake our fire management business effectively and to protect our community, is dependent on employing the most appropriate persons across a wide range of roles and positions, regardless of gender.





For more information contact

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