

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Step 1: Getting started

At this point, you realised that promoting gender equality in your organisation is crucial to have better working conditions and to perform research that is more responsive to societal needs. And now... what can you do?

Context matters!

Rather than simply copying successful actions or approaches that others did, it is better to ask which actions would work best in your own institution, considering its typology and context. By typology, it is intended the mission and statute of the organisation, as RPOs and RFOs have different functions and objectives in the research and innovation system, while RPOs can comprise of private and public structures, universities and research institutes, with different challenges and needs in terms of tackling gender bias and inequalities. Context also matters, as it refers both to the institutional specifics of the organisation (such as its history, path of institutionalization or disciplinary scope) and to the domestic (sub-national and national) legal, policy and research environment in which it operates. Taking into account the typology and context of the institution, which actions, pending some adaptations to fit local conditions, can be aligned with institution's objectives and mission statement? To this end, various elements of this 'context' may matter.

Click here to know more.

In the United States, research has been undertaken into the experiences and insights gained by the institutions that received ADVANCE Institutional Transformation awards from the National Science Foundation. One of the insights draws attention to the important role of context.

The text below, presenting '**key contextual factors**', is drawn from the following document:

[Austin, A. E. and Laursen S. L. \(2015\), Organizational Change Strategies in ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Projects: Synthesis of a Working Meeting, pp. 3-5.](#) →

Location: The location of a higher education institution is relevant to the interventions that will be most effective and relevant. For example, policies to address dual career needs of faculty members are likely to be much more important at institutions in rural settings, where the broader community may offer fewer employment options for partners than it would in an urban area.

Economics: The local or regional economic situation often affects institutional hiring opportunities and can affect the efforts of ADVANCE projects. For example, when an institution that has faced constraints on new hiring shifts into a phase of extensive hiring, the moment is particularly opportune to offer deans and department chairs support and guidance in equitable search and recruitment practices. At such times, the institutional interest in integrating new and effective strategies may be especially strong, and ADVANCE can make inroads by presenting the project as a source of support and help for institutional hiring goals.

Institutional Characteristics: The list and examples below highlight an array of institutional features that create the stage on which organisational change endeavors play out.

History: The history of an institution affects what faculty and administrators think is important and what they perceive to be possible. Major events or problems can sometimes set the stage for administrators and faculty to see ADVANCE goals as important.

Size: The size of departments and the institution overall can shape issues, needs, and options. For example, in small departments, the array of senior faculty who can serve as mentors is also small, requiring innovative approaches to mentoring plans. Privacy needs may also be greater, and early-career women may also prefer to participate in mentoring relationships with colleagues from other departments in order to protect their privacy.

Leadership: The goals, priorities, interests, and styles of senior leaders are key factors in the success of ADVANCE projects. Changes in senior leadership, as occur frequently, can pose challenges and opportunities for organisational change projects, requiring ADVANCE leaders to determine whether to adjust strategies to fit the new leadership context. Sometimes new leaders identify new issues to address; ADVANCE can sometimes be offered as a “solution” that addresses issues identified by a senior leader.

Structure and Governance: Whether an institution tends to be decentralized or centralized, and whether administrative structures are more flat or more hierarchical, are important contextual factors. ADVANCE leaders need to consider where to locate their offices, with whom to connect in the central administration, and how to relate to governance bodies. Whether an institution is unionized or not is another important structural feature for planning.

Policies: Some institutions have a history of offering family-friendly and other policies that contribute to inclusive environments. Others do not. What is already in place thus affects the priorities for addressing policies as a lever for change.

Culture: Higher education institutions are each distinctive in the features that define what life is like at that institution, how work is done, and how change occurs. Some key cultural variables include whether the campus has a “family” feel or a more “business-like” ambiance, the ways in which administrators and faculty interact, and the values that inform daily interactions.

All these characteristics are relevant to making decisions about which interventions to include or omit in an ADVANCE change portfolio, and about how to design those interventions for the best reception on campus.

Watch this video from the [StratEGIC toolkit](#) with testimonials about how different aspects of context matter to shaping institutional change.

Find support

Having an understanding about your context and the dynamics of your institution allows you to think where best to go to find support within and outside the organisation:

- Map actors that have expertise in gender equality. Besides providing relevant gender-related input, they may well act as activists to put actions in motion and help identify other actors.
- Identify (potential) allies: consider top and middle management level, human resources staff, peer co-workers, among others. Try to spot those interested in and willing to promote gender equality change for a better, balanced and inclusive working environment. This will help you get things done and promote support for the future Plan.
- Find funding opportunities to set up and implement the Gender Equality Plan or to carry out specific actions. At EU level, the European Commission is funding institutional change

projects through Horizon 2020. At national or regional level, there may also exist similar initiatives that provide financial means to promote institutional change. At institutional level, there may already be measures in place to fund conferences that promote a gender-balanced composition of the speaking panels, or to finance research that integrates a gender dimension, etc.

- Link up and seek which alliances can be made with regional and national networks on gender in research. Such networks exist and are important for your work.

Understand the Gender Mainstreaming cycle

Having a clear overview of the gender mainstreaming cycle will help you understand, in general terms, the steps to develop a Gender Equality Plan, how to put it in motion and how to live up to it. EIGE's [Gender Mainstreaming Cycle](#) can be adapted to the specific context of research organisations and higher education institutions. Each phase corresponds to a step to develop a Gender Equality Plan:

Define = How to analyse and assess the state-of-play in the institution

Plan = How to set up a Gender Equality Plan

Act = How to implement a Gender Equality Plan

Check = How to monitor progress and evaluate a Gender Equality Plan

Click below to continue to the next step and learn how to analyse and assess the gender equality state-of-play in your institution.



Refer to principles for gender equality in research organisations

As those designed by the EU-funded projects SAGE (H2020) and EGERA (FP7) in order to provide guidance to RPOs, universities and RFOs wanting to implement structural changes towards gender equality.