Research & Innovation Working Together with Men

Senior Research Leaders Pilot

Summary Report 2025

RMIT UNIVERSITY

Why the work

There is a growing body of evidence (e.g., Carlson et al. 2015; Casey et al. 2017; Nash et al. 2021; Warren & Bordoloi 2023) that highlights the need for organisations and communities to work with men to strengthen their knowledge and skills for allyship and co-action for gender equality and harm reduction.

Universities are complex organisations, ones that are traditionally and densely hierarchical and gendered. This complexity is an expression of the systems and processes that interplay between general business operations, governance, policy and legislation and then those associated with the 'core' university business of education and research.

Evidence continues to emphasise the need for institutions to confront the resistance to change which takes the form of inaction and apathy, by building both 'inside' capacity and deploying 'outside' pressure to inspire and build commitment for overall reform and change. This important work must involve men: *"work with men and boys should involve greater efforts to build movements for social change"* (Greig & Flood 2020).

Too often in universities, as in many large and complex organisations, change only occurs due to external pressures, such as legislative or compliance obligations. Change is rarely initiated from within.

Further, when work does occur, it is often championed and undertaken by the very people who are most vulnerable to inequality or harm, and with relatively less power and authority than others in the organisation.

In 2024, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation (DVC R&I), Distinguished Professor Calum Drummond, called for a greater effort by the portfolio in driving gender equality and the active involvement of men in this work. The current pilot project commenced in August 2024 with the sponsorship of the DVC R&I.

Notably, this adaptation of WTWM has been designed using an action-research approach to gain a deeper understanding of what works for engaging senior leaders who are men within RMIT's Research & Innovation Portfolio, and to understand men's allyship more broadly within the context of the higher education setting.

The **model** and it's adaptation for the setting

Working Together with Men (WTWM) is an evolving model that has been applied across Victoria and NSW in several key settings and locations, including two separate dual university and Vocational Educational & Training (VET) institutes, several community organisations, a women's health service (regional) and local government agencies since 2016. The Model has been independently evaluated (e.g. Flood 2017; Shearson et al. 2020), with the most recent work being undertaken at RMIT prior to the senior research leaders' pilot, focused on the building and testing of tools to support evaluation and allyship accountability. The WTWM model is guided by a set of evidence-based principles for allyship and social justice and a Theory of Change. These are a central component for evaluating iterations of the model and men's experiences of allyship when undertaking an adaptation.

The model

- Is designed to be place-based and reflective of the community or organisation an ally is working with.
- Is a volunteer model, where identifying men are expected to undertake this journey and work without remuneration.
- Aims to engage identifying men "where they are at", while also challenging their understanding of inequality, power, privilege, gender, and men's use of harm against others.
- Has key features that are recommended to be copied and applied, including how identifying men are recruited, screened, and trained, and how accountability is incorporated into allies' project ideas.
- Has flexible outcomes in how identifying men can implement change in their area of influence (e.g., a project idea, a policy document, community engagement).

Between August of 2024 and April of 2025, an adaptation of the model commenced for senior research leaders, including a co-occurring ethics approved research project (please note this summary report describes the pilot and does not include findings from the formal research project). This pilot attempt launched at speed and was the first time that work solely dedicated to engaging men in gender equity and gender-based harm prevention work had commenced at RMIT. The complexity of working internally on this style of pilot, one that was also a research and practice project with senior leaders, meant that staff leading the pilot needed to consider a range of unique logistics and considerations. Such as

- the seniority of the men involved and diverse level of roles within the group (seniority and direct line management)
- ally anonymity (considering their potential involvement with the research stream, although separate to this practice stream, as well as recognising there was seniority and direct line management complexities as mentioned above)
- conflicts of interests associated with daily interactions or relationships across colleges or portfolios for both pilot staff, future accountability panellists and the allies themselves as a group
- potential "pedestal effect" associated with allies being elevated too early in their journey based solely on their involvement with the pilot

The practice stream of the pilot, coordination of on-boarding interviews, learning workshops and co-facilitation was overseen in partnership with RMIT's Prevention & Respect area located in Health, Safety & Wellbeing. Communication and feedback between the Prevention & Respect and the Research & Innovation Profile teams occurred within a de-identified framework and allies associated with pilot were not publicly named or shown.

What **happened**

LEGEND

- **Ally commencement of recruitment & on boarding phase**
- **Ally learning & training phase**
- **Accountability recruitment & panel planning**

<table>
<tr><th>AUGUST 2024</th><th>SEPTEMBER 2024</th><th>OCTOBER 2024</th><th>NOVEMBER 2024</th><th>FEBRUARY 2025</th><th>MARCH 2025</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Open cold call out to men in senior research roles sent across email, newsletter, communication channels/platforms and word of mouth.
Adaptation to clarify role of “senior research leader” – Professor and above (holding research team responsibilities) due to high interest from men in professional senior research roles (non-academic).</td><td>Ally Workshop 2
In person - Theory & Evidence, applying knowledge, exploring industry trends</td><td>Ally Workshop 4
In person – Everyday Sexisms in Higher Education</td><td>Ally Workshop 6
In person – You can’t ask that & tips for ally hood.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Interested men were asked to complete an expression of interest form & attend an “on-boarding” interview with pilot staff to explore readiness, commitment, availability & meeting pilot criteria. If not meeting criteria regarding role, details were taken and placed on a wait/interest list if pilot was to continue and broaden its scope.</td><td>Ally Workshop 3
In person - Universities & Masculinities, Power, Privilege & Possibilities</td><td>Ally Lean Canvas Online Session</td><td>Ally Lean Canvas & Pre Panel Prep
Drop in Sessions</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">28 men signed up and completed on-boarding interviews.</td><td rowspan="3">Invitations sent to 20 identified senior women leaders and researchers at RMIT to fulfill a total of 10 remaining panellist positions.</td><td rowspan="3">Ally Workshop 5
Online – Backlash, resistance & co-designing for change</td><td>Accountability Panels held
4 Panels held in total
3 Panellists per panel
4 allies present per panel</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation, Distinguished Professor Calum Drummond acted as both champion and signing up as a participant (ally), calling out to other men to join him across key communication channels.</td><td colspan="2">Scaffolded and tailored learning workshops with industry experts and RMIT staff commenced (based on the model’s principles and Theory of Change) and acknowledging senior leaders previous training and leadership expertise.</td><td rowspan="2">Feedback survey link and paper copies provided to panellists at the end of each panel.</td></tr>
<tr><td>First Steering Committee meeting held</td><td>18 men officially entered the pilot and began the learning phase. Portfolios & Colleges represented, STEM, DSC, COBL & R&I</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">An official SharePoint site created as an interactive hub – high engagement (300 views).</td><td>Ally Workshop 1
Online - Intro to prevention, the challenge, the context & the model</td><td colspan="3">Panellists were provided with a commitment sheet similar to the ally commitment sheet detailing the pilot, links to the WTWM model, resources and SharePoint site and are invited to meet with pilot staff individually at a time of their choosing (online or in person) Optional on boarding and pre panel preparation online sessions offered to all panellists.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Drop-in online information sessions held for all staff who were interested or wanted to know more. Provided context for the pilot, the ask and who is being invited to “sign up”.
Two women signed up for panels from these sessions</td><td colspan="2">Ally retention
4 allies left the pilot at this stage due to time commitment challenges, ill health and retirement.
The model requires all sessions (within reason, no more than one missed overall) to be attended by an ally for them to complete the program.</td><td colspan="2">14 allies continued into 2025 and were retained across the final phase</td></tr>
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OTHER KEY MOMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS THAT HAPPENED

Considerations and complexity in seeking identifying women who were **senior leaders and researchers within RMIT** (due to the challenges associated with the speed of the pilot timeline, potential allies and panellist conflict of interests, anonymity, reporting lines and interdisciplinary partnership and working relationships).

An **external Senior Leader and Researcher** and PhD Alumni of RMIT, was invited to sit the most senior level ally panel. This solution better met the challenges associated with power and conflicts-of-interest related to the panel comprising of the most senior allies.

WTWM SharePoint site had continued high engagement with over 700 site visits across the pilot. All workshop slide decks, reading lists and resources provided for all RMIT staff to access. Transparency of content and process of allies and a support section for accountability panellists.

Ally Action & Post Panel Phase

APRIL AND BEYOND 2025

Ally Panel Debrief & Going Forward final pilot workshop. Feedback survey link provided to allies at this session for completion.

Allies attempt to gather other men in their sphere of influence to action change and bring them along to co-work and further development of key ideas.

This includes further **strengthening their allyship to women** and those most impacted by gender-based harm and inequality and better aligning their work with RMIT frameworks and networks.

Conclusion and recommendations

The feedback received from allies and panellists involved in the pilot shows that the WTWM model was generally well-received, with most participants supportive of its continuation within RMIT. In particular, allies were supportive of the model's key processes that encourage learning, reflection and sharing, and panellists appreciated the model's embedding of women's voices within organisational approaches to gender equity in academia.

Based on this feedback, some recommendations for the future of this model include:

- Seek and commit resources to enable the continuation of WTWM at RMIT, including ongoing support for and engagement of current allies as a growing community of practice, and the subsequent training of more identifying men as allies across RMIT.
- Seek buy-in and commitment from VC-level to promote further top-down support for the model and embedding WTWM in organisational practices across portfolios and disciplines.
- Further integrate the use of WTWM resources and tools into all stages of the model's scale-up, particularly the Principles for Allyship as a tool to prepare for and debrief the Accountability Panel process, for allies and panellists.
- Continue to invest in tailoring resources and model processes to the higher education context, including adequate time for the learning stage, increase the targeted support for allies' idea development, and communications for recruitment, onboarding, sharing information and updates more broadly and openly.
- Continue to tailor and extend key components of ally training, particularly around intersectionality and engaging with marginalised groups, allyship and accountability in the institutional context of higher education, participatory approaches to culture change and organisational development, and trauma-informed approaches to gender equity and gender-based harm and violence work.

In closing

This pilot was the first attempt at RMIT to engage men in senior research leadership positions to build knowledge, skills and collective action for allyship focused on addressing gender-based harm and violence. It was also, to our knowledge, the only attempt nationally to gather senior men within the higher education context to undertake both learning and action.

The Working Together with Men model is based on nine years of practice-based evidence-building, on decades of activism and research to end violence, and is embedded with the lived experience of those most impacted by inequality and gendered harm. WTWM seeks to both *connect and transform* people and systems within their location or setting and is an intensive approach to gather men in the "moveable middle" *(VicHealth 2018*). That is, the model targets those who are ready to enact change and those who are curious, open and willing to be persuaded and mobilised.

At the time of this pilot, the most recent national research on working with men to end violence was launched, echoing established evidence on the crucial need to engage men in prevention work and their willingness to do so, but also their confusion or hesitancy for how to meaningfully get involved *(Respect Victoria 2024)*.

By continuing to invest in and expand the WTWM model, RMIT now has a unique opportunity to promote innovation and adaptation, to deepen the evidence for addressing gender-based harms, and to support movement-building in the RMIT community and the higher education sector more broadly for allyship and collective action.

References

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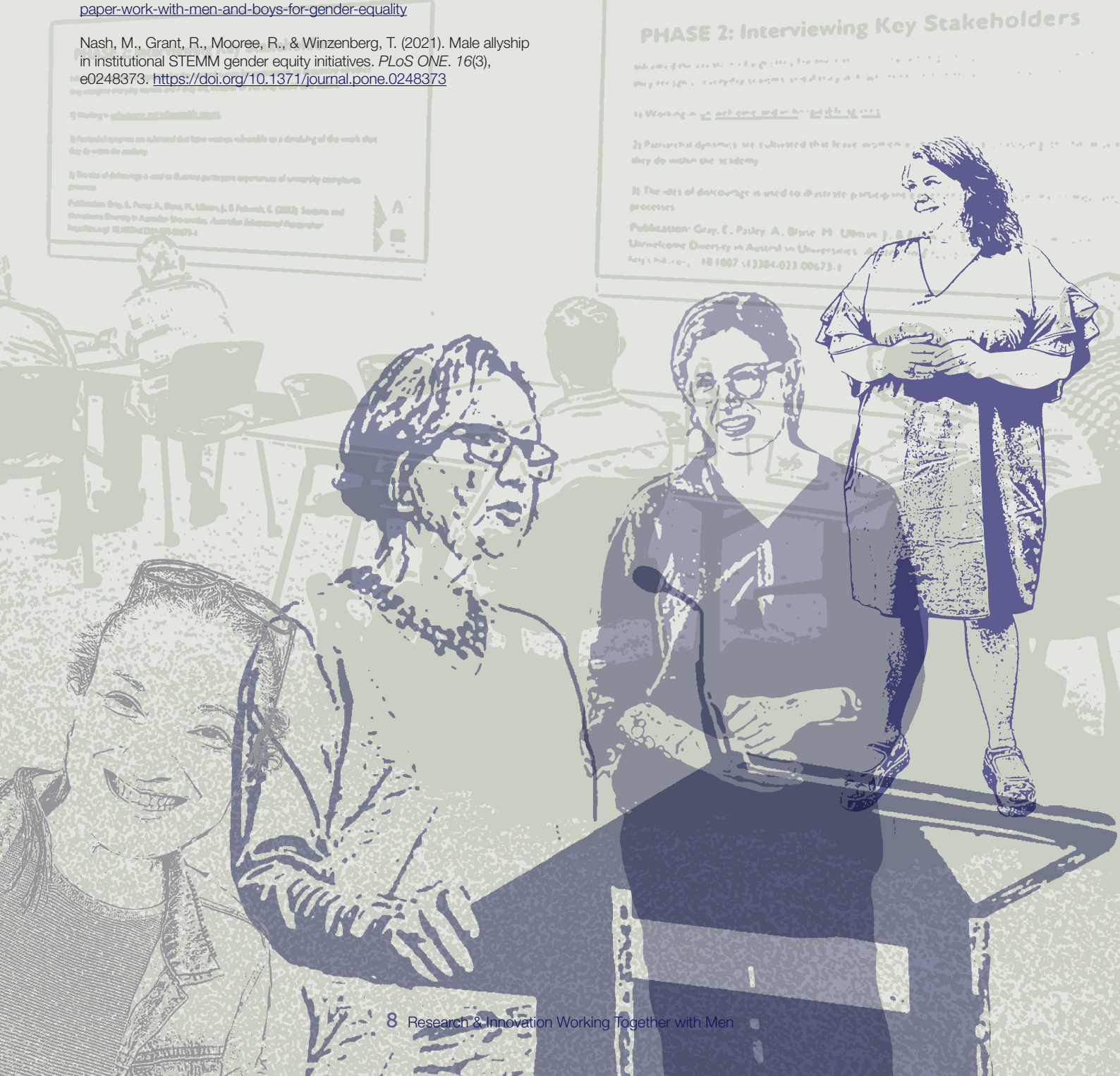


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