



## Responses and Scenarios/Practice

*It's helpful to remember that you have options when it comes to responding to comments regarding gender bias and affinity spaces. Here are a handful to keep in mind.*

*It takes PRACTICE to bring these responses to life and make them useful.*

### **Responding to Negative Comments about the Habitat for Aviation- Women Build:**

Sampling of comments:

- An all female build? That's discrimination.
- Why aren't men involved?
- That's not equal treatment. There needs to be an all male build too.
- Others? . . .

**Sampling of some possible responses.** Keep in mind, your relationship with the commenter will significantly impact how, *or if*, you choose to respond. If there's a way to convey your message in a positive and inclusive manner, emphasizing the shared goal of promoting diversity and breaking down gender stereotypes in the aviation industry, this is often received more openly.

- This is not a competition, it's just to raise awareness that in 2023 (4), we've still so far to go as women in this particular industry. Recent reports indicate that we, as women, are actually less represented in the industry than we were even a few years ago. (Beth)
- The intent of the all-female group is not to discriminate against men but rather to create a space where women can support each other, share experiences, and work towards common goals.
- This project is specifically focused on empowering women in the field of aviation. It's not about excluding men, but rather creating an environment where women can take the lead and showcase their skills in a traditionally male-dominated industry.
- This is a special initiative to encourage and celebrate women's contributions to aviation while encouraging more women to explore these opportunities. This is just one way to showcase the talents and capabilities of women in this particular industry while looking toward the future.
- Women are often underrepresented in aviation, and this project aims to change that by providing a platform for women to learn key skills in this field. It's about breaking stereotypes and encouraging diversity in a field where women have historically been less visible.
- Promoting diversity doesn't mean exclusion. An all-female group can contribute to a more diverse and inclusive overall environment by providing opportunities and visibility to women. We're working to increase women in these careers and these spaces have proven to be a way to support this. We know that more diverse workplaces are better for everyone.

- While this project is focused on women in aviation, we welcome support and collaboration from anyone interested in contributing to the cause of gender equity and advancing opportunities for women in a male-dominated field. It's about creating opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender.
- We appreciate the interest! If you or any men you know are passionate about aviation and would like to get involved to help expand access and opportunities to women, we welcome collaboration and would love to work together to make this project a success.
- I agree, an all male/youth build may also be really beneficial for those participants. That should be created and led by a man. For now, we are focusing on this group and ways to support them and we're excited about it!
- If the people you mentioned who are talking negatively about our effort to recruit and inspire girls in aviation want to share an example of an all female airplane build, that would be very helpful. We could reach out to them for further inspiration and collaboration on this effort.  
(Beth)
- If relevant, mention that anti-discrimination laws generally focus on preventing unfair treatment based on protected characteristics like race, gender, or age. An all-female group doesn't typically violate these laws if its purpose aligns with promoting equality. The goal is to promote equality within aviation career fields where women represent less than 10% of the workforce.
- Use analogies to help the person understand that sometimes groups are formed with a specific focus. For example, just as a support group for cancer survivors is not discriminating against non-cancer patients, an all-female build group has the specific purpose of exposing women to these careers in an environment away from the cultural pressures that are constantly placed on them and often harmful (example, male gaze, performance bias, motherhood bias, likeability bias. . .), without excluding or discriminating against others.
- Share information about the historical context of gender discrimination within this field, and the need for affirmative action in certain situations. Explain that sometimes creating spaces for underrepresented groups helps address imbalances that have existed in the past and continue to negatively impact women in this field.
- Others? . . .

### **General Guidelines for Responding to Gender Bias:**

- **No response:** Sometimes a comment doesn't need a response. At times comments are made to challenge and create tension and to continue harmful stereotypes. No response can be a very powerful response. *What does this look like?* Don't respond to an email. Don't respond to a phone call. Don't respond to a question- walk away. This can also be called ignore/delete. Having an affinity space to process these slights can help this response feel empowering.
- **Don't validate it:**
  - "That's not funny."
  - "Ouch."
  - "If you're saying it's going to be offensive, I'd appreciate it if you didn't say it."
- **Ask questions:**
  - "Can you help me understand what you meant by that, or what you intended by that?"

- “I think you meant to say \_\_\_\_\_; is that correct?”
  - “I want to make sure we’re on the same page, so can I play back to you what I just heard you say?”
  - “Can you explain how that relates to what we’re talking about?”
  - “I’m uncomfortable with what you just said; can you help me understand where you’re coming from?”
  - “I don’t get that joke. Can you explain it to me?”
- **Push back on more inappropriate comments:**
    - “I’m not comfortable with continuing this discussion based on what you just said. Can we pause and restart once we’ve had time to discuss it?”
    - “I wonder if you would say the same thing if you were talking about a man?”
    - Do you think that applies to everyone here, no matter their gender identity?
- **Communicate discomfort:**
    - “What you just said is hurtful to me because \_\_\_\_\_; can you help me understand where you’re coming from?”
    - “When you say that it makes me feel like you’re commenting on \_\_\_\_\_; can you clarify if that is your intention?”
    - “I’m uncomfortable with what you just said because it isn’t aligned with our company/my personal values; can we talk offline about the specifics?”
- **“Call In” to a conversation, either at the time or soon afterward:**
    - “I think we have to/should be careful about making assumptions about that; it may not apply to everyone.”
    - “I think it’s important to take multiple perspectives into consideration. Would you be open to doing that?”
    - “Let’s bring a few of our colleagues with different perspectives into the conversation to see if it resonates with them.”



Ready Responses Practice

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"Wait, what? An all female build? That's discrimination."

What could you say to this comment?



Ready Responses Practice

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A coworker hears that you are spending your Sunday's building an airplane with other women. He says, "Why aren't men involved, that's discrimination".

How might you respond to this comment?



### Ready Responses Practice

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You notice that a woman suggests an idea in a meeting, and it falls flat. A few minutes later, a man suggests the same idea and gets an enthusiastic reaction.

- What could you say to bring attention to this situation in the moment?
- What could you do after the meeting to follow up about this situation?



### Ready Responses Practice

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Males on your jobsite or in the office frequently interrupt females in group discussions.

- As a female in this situation, how would that feel?
- What could you say to bring attention to this situation in the moment?



### Ready Responses Practice

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In the lunchroom, a male coworker frequently talks about their sex & dating life. You have noticed that it makes several people feel uncomfortable, men as well as women.

- What action can you take in this situation? What can you say in the moment when this person begins talking about these things?
- What could you say or do to prevent this in the future?



### Ready Responses Practice

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You have noticed several incidents of biased behavior on your team, and your manager has let it go unchallenged. It is beginning to feel very uncomfortable for you and some others on the team.

- Is there anything you can do in the moment when you notice these behaviors?
- What can you do to address the issue and prevent it from continuing?



### Ready Responses Practice

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You notice that female coworkers are always the ones being asked to sweep up and clean, even though it is not part of their official job duties.

- How could you handle this situation so that it feels fair to everyone?



### Ready Responses Practice

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On a job site, a male crew member comments to a female crew member, “You look great climbing up on that ladder.”

- As the woman trying to do your job (in a potentially dangerous situation on a ladder off the ground), how would this comment make you feel? What could you do or say in response in the moment? What could you do later?
- If you witnessed this interaction, what could you do or say in the moment? Later?

#### **Content above comes from the following sources:**

- Beth White, Habitat for Aviation
- Vermont Works for Women
- Change the Story, Vermont

**If your employer is looking for additional resources, workshops, or consultation regarding understanding and overcoming gender bias and/or recruitment and retention for gender equity, we are available to connect. Email us at: [genderequity@vtworksforwomen.org](mailto:genderequity@vtworksforwomen.org) or directly to Margaret Overman, Gender Equity Services Manager at [Moverman@vtworksforwomen.org](mailto:Moverman@vtworksforwomen.org).**