

Digna Case Study



This case study outlines the steps taken by VIDEA to undertake the 3rd annual review of our “Anti-Harassment and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures” (“the policy”) through a decolonial feminist and inclusive lens. This paper recounts the process of this review in order to allow for its recreation by organizations that aim to integrate their decolonial, feminist, anti-racist and inclusive values into policies. This particular policy covers harassment, in addition to sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), as VIDEA understands these issues to be interconnected and most effectively addressed together.

Fundamental Key Approaches:

Collaborating with Overseas and Indigenous Staff:

VIDEA recognizes the need to integrate diverse voices into policies while also decolonizing the historically unilateral, top-down process of policy creation and implementation. This review highlights how to create and adapt policies, making them accessible, collaborative and inclusive.

VIDEA’s process included three collaborative consultation stages. In the first stage, overseas staff reviewed the policy to ensure that it was context specific and appropriate. The second stage engaged Indigenous youth to support and advise on the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge. This stage included the co-creation of a definition of ‘lateral violence’ and an exploration of top-down policy creation and its impact on marginalized communities. The third stage involved another consultation by overseas staff who signed off on the final draft. Horizontal and open communication with overseas and Indigenous staff members about policies and how they affect communities differently, led to the integration of important and often excluded perspectives.

Grounded in Law:

It is common for PSEA policies to include human rights language that is not grounded in law. Unfortunately, theoretical or conceptual ideals of human rights are not necessarily applicable to labour laws, making it important to ground PSEA policies in provincial, federal or international law. VIDEA took steps to ground their policy in British Columbia Labour Laws in order to solidify its applicability and delivery. For example, ‘zero tolerance’ policies are common; however, labour laws require the legal burden of proof, making zero-tolerance policies legally unenforceable. Therefore, despite having a zero-tolerance policy in place, we must be realistic and honest about the proof and/or process necessary to dismiss staff legally, with or without cause, especially in cases of sexual harassment. An explicit grounding in provincial or federal law is crucial to employees’ full understanding of what is and is not

enforceable in cases including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) allegations.

Restorative Justice:

VIDEA chose to adopt a restorative justice model for this policy. Restorative justice is intended to address allegations of SEA or persistent harassment in a way that encourages engagement, accountability, honesty, community, healing and reparation.

The restorative justice approach is applicable in many cases, an example of which is when an employee has not been terminated because on their actions. This approach allows an opportunity for the unlearning of harmful behaviours and re-learning safe behaviours, leading to overall growth. However, for VIDEA, this approach does not require a survivor or complainant to address, confront or share space with a respondent. Restorative justice processes are only applicable in the event that all parties consent to participation.

Acknowledging and Appreciating Staff Involvement:

VIDEA included a section at the end of the policy acknowledging those that were involved in the review and recreation of this policy. Their participation in this process was integral and valuable and it is important that staff appreciate that their input is both valuable and instrumental in the shaping of policy. This also supports the decolonial aim of deconstructing power dynamics and hierarchal processes in which policy decision-making centers on senior staff and Board members. Placing decision-making power in the hands of diverse staff members, of all levels and experiences, builds better, fuller policies and supports staff understanding and appreciation for them.

Additional Documentation:

This 11page policy is the result of numerous consultation processes. Due to the complexity of the issues addressed and the detail necessary to support understanding, additional documentation and support was required.

Sex Work Document: Discussions on PSEA in this sector often neglect the role of sex work in SEA allegations. Sex workers' rights and safety are often ignored. After consultation with a BC Labour Law expert, we discovered that it is illegal and in violation of employee's human rights, to restrict them from engaging in sex work either as a consumer or as a sex worker. Therefore, instead of an "abstinence-only" approach that assumes staff will not engage in sex work because they have been asked not to, we created a best practices guide for buying and selling sex. This document outlines sex work laws in each country where VIDEA has employees and programs. We then sought to understand and analyse the ethical purchase of sex work, which is an area lacking significant research in either academic or the international development sectors. This document was created, and noted here, to include analysis about sex workers rights, an employees' rights to buy or sell sex, and the links to employment law.

Lateral Violence: Discussions about lateral violence are critical to addressing the power dynamics that

contribute to SEA and harassment, and critical in taking a decolonial approach to PSEA. SEA and harassment can take many forms, including horizontal and lateral violence (see Section 3.6 for a full definition of lateral violence). Lateral violence is a colonial strategy used to disempower and disenfranchise exploited people often resulting in displaced violence, anger, sadness, dissatisfaction, or fear against members of a similar group. We chose to create an additional document to support staff understanding of lateral violence, its impacts, and its role in PSEA and harassment.

Increased Accessibility:

The VIDEA team is rich in diversity of experiences, culture, knowledge, language, ability and so much more. Following the policy review, VIDEA staff considered how to make this document as accessible to as many people as possible. To achieve this, we decided that this policy, and all other VIDEA policies, would be made available in oral recording, and video forms, and supplemented with youth-friendly infographics, posters, and social media.

Key Takeaways:

We prioritised the integration of decolonisation and reconciliation approaches, and feminist principles, into this review process. The feminist concept of self-reflexivity was used to integrate staff into this process, recognize their unique and important lived experience and expertise, and ensure that their voices are reflected at the policy level. VIDEA hopes that this case study will encourage other organizations to develop wide and diverse consultation processes, that from their foundations reflect the lived experience and expertise of their staff, overseas partners, and program participants. The following are key takeaways from this process:

Include the perspectives of all staff members, especially Indigenous, LGBTQI2+, differently abled, BIPOC and local overseas staff and program participants to support the creation of policies that reflect the lived reality of diverse populations, that are owned from the ground up by those that they impact, making them easier to understand, and implement;

Break down complex topics and definitions, creating additional documents to support understanding and applicability;

Using alternative formats – audio and video – to build the accessibility, awareness and comprehension of policies.