



Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023

Building Australia's
best regional community



Bundaberg Regional Council acknowledges the Traditional Country of the Taribelang Bunda, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang, and Bailai Peoples and recognise that this Country has always been and continues to be of cultural, spiritual, social and economic significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We recognise the thousands of generations of continuous culture that have shaped this country and the people on it.

Foreword

Bundaberg Regional Council (Council) is proud to present its first Workforce Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategy.

As a local government and a significant employer within the region, we look to the future to plan for the skills and knowledge needed to provide the services required by our community. As our community becomes more diverse, so too must Council's workforce to fully understand and address the community's changing needs.

This strategy outlines our continued commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace that recognises and appreciates the diversity of its employees and supports all employees to achieve their potential.

Council has a long history of supporting and embracing our differences through a workforce as diverse as the community we serve.

This strategy pulls together all the efforts and work done daily to build a strong workplace culture.

While the strategy is founded on Council's Corporate Values and a set of guiding principles, at its very core is respect:

- **Respect** for self
- **Respect** for all others
- **Respect** for the role that Council employees play in providing services to the community.

When we demonstrate respect, we are demonstrating a strong alignment with the intent of this strategy.

As an organisation, we are dedicated to ensuring all employees have an equal opportunity to contribute without fear of embarrassment, penalty, or repercussions, as we become an even more agile organisation that quickly and effectively responds to the needs of our community.



Introduction

Council's Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023 sets out Council's commitment to workforce diversity and inclusion. It provides the framework under which diversity and inclusion strategies and actions will be developed and implemented and shows how Council's diversity and inclusion maturity will develop over the course of the strategy.

What is workforce diversity and inclusion?

Workforce diversity:

- acknowledges the diverse skills and perspectives that people bring to the workplace because of their gender, age, language, cultural background, disability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, working style, work and life experiences, and other qualities and diversities.
- ensures that our workforce is reflective of the community that we serve.
- means having diversity of thought and leadership to make our work the best it can be.

Workforce inclusion:

- removes barriers to enable all employees to reach their potential and feel included.
- supports the development and achievement of organisational outcomes.
- values the individual characteristics each person brings to the workplace.
- creates an environment of respect, trust and appreciation of difference.
- allows all employees to work to their potential and produce the best outcomes for our community.

A diverse and inclusive workplace results in:

- people feeling valued and supported in their work to achieve their full potential.
- increased collaboration, innovation, initiative, and improvement in overall organisational performance.

Scope of this strategy

The strategy is focused on Council's workforce. A range of actions, including resources and tools, will be developed as part of this strategy's actions.

This is a three-year strategy, developing Council's diversity and inclusion maturity and acknowledging that change, especially significant cultural change, takes time. The first year of this strategy's efforts will establish the foundations on which further actions will be built over time. Figure 1 depicts the predicted progress in workforce diversity and inclusion maturity over time covered by this strategy.

This strategy:

- recognises the need to reflect the diversity of our community in the way we promote, design, develop and deliver our services.
- sets the foundations for us to build an inclusive workplace culture based on Council's values.
- recognises and promotes the significant benefits of the different skills, experiences, backgrounds, and talents within our workforce.
- demonstrates Council's commitment to being a role-model employer for diversity and inclusion to showcase the benefits that come from genuinely embracing diversity, and attracting, retaining and developing high-quality employees.
- demonstrates Council's commitment to creating a culture of inclusion by embracing diversity and fostering positive cultural change.

Council workforce diversity and inclusion maturity

Figure 1:

Activities	Outcomes
<p>Optimising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence driven activities implemented across the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad recognition, understanding and support for D&I approaches
<p>Progressive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on continuous improvement Monitor, analyse and report on D&I outcomes Active sharing of D&I outcomes across the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D&I behaviours demonstrated throughout organisation Branch specific D&I approaches developed and implemented
<p>Established</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement D&I Strategy Monitor and report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D&I viewed positively D&I behaviours and capabilities embedded Greater awareness of D&I outcomes Increased D&I system thinking across projects and collaboration
<p>Emerging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools developed and available Provision of support and advice Build knowledge and capability, skills and attitudes Build accountability and governance Develop the D&I Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of D&I development Understanding of accountabilities
<p>Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refresh existing policies, tools and governance Build awareness and practices Research specific issues Collect available data to inform forward approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited awareness of best practice and outcomes Ad hoc implementation



Investing in our People Strategy

In 2021 Council released its People, Safety and Culture Strategy (People Strategy). The People Strategy highlights our people as the organisation’s strength in achieving its goals and commits to working across six key areas to ensure our people are capable, able to perform at their best, and feel empowered, valued, and supported.

This strategy is a key enabler of the People Strategy, and its implementation is an action under the **Organisational Culture** element. This strategy also supports the elements of **Attraction and retention**, and **Leadership capabilities**.

Figure 2:



Legislation

Unlawful discrimination in employment

Discrimination means treating a person unfavourably because of a protected attribute, such as age, disability, race, gender, gender identity or sexuality. Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination occurs if a person treats a person with a protected attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. Indirect discrimination occurs if a person imposes a requirement or condition on everyone, but it has the effect of disadvantaging persons with an attribute and is not reasonable.

Relevant legislation

- *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003 (Qld)*
- *Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*
- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld)*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*
- *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)*
- *Industrial Relations Act 2016 (Qld)*
- *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*
- *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994 (Qld)*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*
- *Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Act 2003 (Qld)*
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)*

Diversity and inclusion guiding principles

Council's diversity and inclusion guiding principles are built from our corporate values, and along with these values underpin the operations of Council:

- Our strength is our ability to leverage diverse thinking
- Treat everyone with respect
- Create a work environment that is accessible to all people and supports all people to realise their full potential
- Leaders role model and reinforce diversity and inclusive behaviours
- Council's Code of Conduct and the corporate values are central to everything that Council does
- Speak up against discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, vilification, or victimisation; this behaviour is not tolerated
- Maintain a workplace where people are confident in being themselves, where they choose to identify who they are and are accepted.





Diversity and inclusion focus areas

This strategy focuses on nine diversity areas that allow for a range of actions supported by the organisational culture, policy, and procedure to deliver on Council's diversity and inclusion objectives. There are specific actions, including how they will be developed, implemented, monitored and report on, for each focus area. This approach provides a strong foundation for moving Council's diversity and inclusion maturity.

Figure 3:



Focus 1: Inclusive and diverse leadership

Building inclusive leadership supports the development of inclusive capabilities in all individuals, teams, and leadership roles.

Every leader within Council has the responsibility to actively support and encourage an open and collaborative culture and demonstrate a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Strengthening the diversity in Council leadership assists Council's decision making and ensures the diversity of opinions brought by a diverse leadership group aligns Council's service delivery and the community's expectations.

Focus 2: Inclusive systems and processes

Effective systems and processes which are easily accessible and usable by everyone contribute to Council's service delivery to the community.

Changes in technology provide numerous opportunities to design customised approaches that better support diversity and inclusion.

Systems and processes are more than technology. The way in which Council's operates must reduce barriers and ensure that all employees feel included and supported. The language used in documents, reports, forms; providing non-binary descriptions for gender; accessibility options for people with vision impairment or literacy issues; or fully understanding the new/innovative ways in which work can be done are examples of ways in which Council's demonstrates its commitment to supporting diversity and inclusion.

Focus 3: Workforce flexibility

Council has a long-standing and well-established approach to workplace flexibility. Many employees have formal and informal arrangements in place. No one-size-fits-all when it comes to workplace flexibility, so individual employees and managers are encouraged to consider how work can be done. When an employee requests flexibility, managers and supervisors must consider each request on its merits when making decisions.

For flexibility arrangements to work for everyone, genuine commitment from employees, their managers and their teams is required. For flexibility to become 'part of the way we do things here', a culture of 'yes we can be flexible' needs to exist, giving people permission and support to balance their work/careers with other things that are important to them. Technology can play a significant part in not only the way that work is done but to build this culture.

Focus 4: First Nations

First Nations people are diverse in their culture and heritage. People of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander origins have unique connections to country, culture, and identity through descent bloodlines as well as spirituality belief systems. In the Bundaberg Region there are four traditional custodial (language/clan) groups being:

- Taribelang Bunda
- Gurang
- Gooreng Gooreng
- Bailai

Council recognises the individual diversity of all first nations people and the contributions they make in building Australia's best regional community. As such, Council focuses on improving relationships and corporate sustainability through Council's First Nations Strategy, which builds cultural awareness and appropriateness. The First Nations Strategy is complemented and aligned with this strategy.

Focus 5: Generational Diversity

Age bias and discrimination has detrimental impacts on how people are treated and perceived by others, limiting potential and impacts others health and wellbeing. Proactively addressing generational diversity protects people's rights and enables them to contribute fully in the workplace.

It is important from a community service perspective that Council's workforce appropriately reflects its community. The Bundaberg community is a diverse community made up of a range of age groups; as such Council's workforce must represent this diversity.

Support for all age groups within Council is not about assuming what a person's life intentions are; it is about having open and honest discussions and developing options that meet the person's and Council's needs. Whether it is supporting mature workers to transition to retirement and take up a mentoring role or providing young workers with interesting and challenging work that helps them realise their potential and learn new skills, options are open for consideration.

Focus 6: Cultural diversity

Australia is known as one of the most successful multicultural nations in the world (Kymlicka 2007). In the 2016 Census, 12% of the Bundaberg Local Government Area population were born outside of Australia (compared to 21.6% of Queensland population). Also, 4.6% of the Bundaberg Local Government Area population said that they spoke English and other languages at home (compared to 12% of the Queensland population).

Cultural diversity considers cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD), non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), family origins, and religious diversity.

Having a diverse workforce that is reflective of the wider community's cultural backgrounds helps Council make policy and program decisions that best meet the needs of the community. A culturally diverse workforce brings knowledge and experiences relevant to the workplace as well.



Our community expects Council to operate fairly and equitably and to not discriminate in its work practices or in the delivery of services.

Focus 7: LGBTIQ+

Council recognises that individuals may identify and be recognised within the community as a gender other than what they were assigned at birth or during infancy, or as a gender that is not exclusively male or female. According to a study completed in 2016, one in two LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning and non-binary) Australians hide their sexual identity in the workplace as they fear this may cause damage to their careers (Pride in Diversity, 2016), and that their senior management are less likely to genuinely support inclusion initiatives (Pride in Diversity, 2016).

Council is committed to ensuring that we are building awareness about the specific challenges and experiences LGBTIQ+ employees face in the workplace and promoting inclusion and support to make Council's workplace a safe and respectful environment where everyone is treated equally and feels included valued. Addressing conscious and unconscious bias and discrimination is central to creating an inclusive workplace that enables all employees to reach their full potential.

Focus 8: Disability

Discrimination against an employee, or potential employee, is not only illegal it has a negative impact on Council's culture and impacts on Council's service delivery for others with disabilities within our community.

People with disabilities bring a range of skills, talents, and abilities. They can work in a range of different jobs and occupations and hold tertiary and trade qualifications.

People with disabilities can experience challenges at work because of workplace design and how work is carried out. Accessibility options assist Council and employees with disabilities put in place adjustments that support these employees success. Importantly, accessibility is not simply about people with disabilities; it is about everyone in the workplace having the right environment to work at their best.

Focus 9: Gender equity

The gender gap within the Australian workforce continues to be present; women continue to earn less than their male counterparts, are less likely to advance their careers and accumulate less superannuation savings.

Gender equality in the workplace aims to achieve broadly equitable outcomes for women and men, where all can achieve their ambitions, experience gender-balanced leadership, and value the contributions of all equally. This requires:

- challenging conscious and unconscious bias.
- removal of barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the workforce.
- access to all occupations, including leadership roles, regardless of gender.
- elimination of discrimination based on gender, particularly in relation to family and caring responsibilities.
- flexible work arrangements for those suffering from or caring for someone suffering from family and domestic violence.



The Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan

Creating a culture where diversity and inclusion is genuinely embedded takes a lot of work and dedication from all employees at all levels of Council. A Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan will be developed annually, aligned to Council's Corporate and Operational Plans. This action plan will support and sustain the cultural and behavioural changes to come in the years ahead.

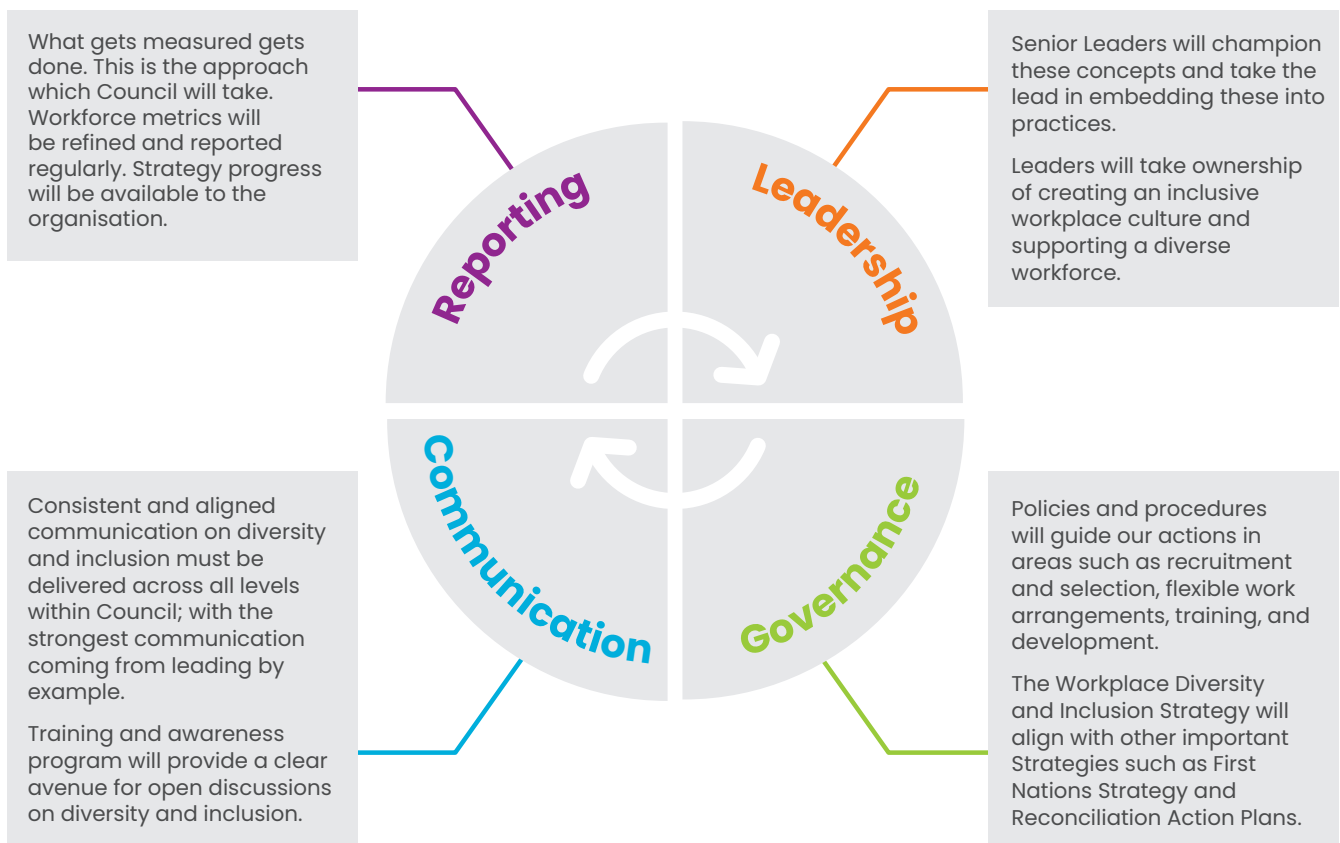
The Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan will focus on:

- **Providing guidance and support**
This includes policies, guidance documents, tools and resources to support inclusive practices. It also includes having knowledgeable employees who can provide advice and influence decisions to improve workforce diversity and inclusion.
- **Raising awareness**
Utilising a range of communication options and channels, the awareness of workforce diversity and inclusion issues will be raised, fostering supportive attitudes and influencing workplace culture over time.
- **Building skills and capability**
Building skills and capability through formal and informal development opportunities for employees to improve their practices.
- **Building evidence and tracking progress**
Enhancing Council's ability to capture and access data and research that can inform our decisions about where action is needed and help Council prioritise activities over the strategy's life.
- **Ensuring good governance**
Strengthen the governance around diversity and inclusion, including leadership buy-in and sponsorship, and building accountability, respect and human rights.

Critical success factors

The success of this strategy is dependent upon four factors shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4:





References

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census

The Australian Government Department of Social Services, "An Employer's Guide to Employing Someone with Disability"

Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2016) "Willing to work: National inquiry into employment discrimination against older workers"

Diversity Council Australia (2013) "Closing the work gap in corporate Australia"

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