

The Diversity Agenda

Emerging Diversity and Inclusion

While many industries have increased the number of women in the workforce, the engineering and architecture professions have continued to be male-dominated with just 14 per cent of engineers female and 20 per cent of architects. But that's about to change.

In 2017 the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA), Engineering New Zealand, and ACENZ (the Association for Consulting and Engineering Professionals) agreed that it was time to stand up for a better gender balance in their professions. The consensus was that today's graduating classes are far more diverse than the architectural and engineering professions, and collective action was needed to make the workforces resilient to the challenges of the changing world.



Working together, they developed the Diversity Agenda, asking industry leaders to commit to the goal of 20 percent more women in architecture and engineering by 2021.

Launched in April 2018, the initiative includes several key issues; pay equity, retaining and promoting women to leadership roles, and changing working culture for everyone's benefit.

Engineering New Zealand's General Manager of Marketing and Communications Bridgit Sissons says architecture and engineering firms from all across the country have signed up to the Diversity Agenda and committed publicly to the goal of keeping and retaining more women in their businesses.

"Effecting change is not easy, but we have strength in numbers. Our influence is 30,000 plus members - that's 30,000 individuals who can make a difference," says Bridgit.

"The Diversity Agenda has a singular focus on women. But this is only the beginning. Our goal is to help our professions commit to creating a resilient and long-lasting diverse workforce that reflects all aspects of society and draws on this to lead the way in innovation."

Accountability is central to the Diversity Agenda, and the commitment to change is led from the top. The campaign is spearheaded by the chief executives and presidents of the professions' industry bodies - Engineering New Zealand, NZIA and ACENZ. They are the faces of the campaign, recruiting members, launching the campaign to industry peers, and raising awareness in public about what the Diversity Agenda wants to achieve, through media and social media channels.

The specific target of 20 per cent more women by 2021 gives participating organisations something to commit and measure up to. The Diversity Agenda includes a tikanga - a code defining six principles businesses can use to assess their situation and understand the gaps in their workforce and approach. A digital hub pulls together a variety of resources, and a taskforce of mentors and leaders is available to directly assist businesses to adapt to a more inclusive workplace through stakeholder management, planning and cultural change.

Ahead of the April 2017 launch, 45 leading engineering and architecture firms signed up as Founding Partners and Change Makers.

“We felt it was important to launch with a core group of committed and passionate organisations who were prepared to champion the Diversity Agenda publicly and put their money where their mouth is,” says Bridgit.

The founding organisations were required to make a public commitment to the tikanga and target of 20 per cent more women by 2021.

“They will champion diversity in their own workplaces and share successes. And, crucially, they will participate in our benchmark Diversity Agenda survey,” says Bridgit. “This survey will be repeated annually so we can monitor and measure progress towards our target. The results will be shared publicly across the professions.”

Twice a year, workshops will be held so all Founding Partners can share their experiences of what’s working, and what isn’t.

“The hope is by sharing and working together, we’ll collectively find ways to address and respond to some of the major barriers to careers for women in architecture and engineering,” says Bridgit.

While still in its early days, the initiative gained momentum quickly. Within the first month, Facebook posts reached 75,589 people and garnered 4,723 engagements. The launch video was viewed 1857 times on Facebook and YouTube.

Anecdotally, the Diversity Agenda is already making a difference, says Bridgit.

“One engineering leader recognised for the first time how regular early morning meetings adversely affect parents, particularly mothers, in the workforce who struggle to get their children to school and get to the meeting on time. Moving the meetings to later in the morning made little difference to the flow of the workday and had a huge positive impact for those parents,” she says.



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