



## Downer New Zealand

### LEADERSHIP

#### MEDIUM-LARGE ORGANISATION HIGHLY COMMENDED

**WATCH  
VIDEO**



By concentrating on inclusion and equitable opportunities for Māori as tangata whenua, Downer leaders are creating a culture where difference is communicated, celebrated and included.

Downer employs 11,000 people providing services across several sectors including transportation, telecommunications, facilities management, hospitality, laundries, water, open spaces and energy.

After recognising challenges within its workforce, including increasing and valuing diversity, attracting employees in a competitive workplace, and a lack of diversity at leadership level, Downer developed a suite of integrated initiatives to address them.

General Manager People and Culture Debbie Kirby says there was clear strategic intent to concentrate first on ensuring inclusion and equitable opportunities for Māori as tangata whenua, and then creating a culture where difference is communicated and celebrated.

“We work in diverse communities across the country, acknowledge the special place that Māori hold as tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand and we are building a workforce that is reflective of our local communities and of our values as a socially responsible organisation. This is evidenced through the consistent executive sponsorship, which is also reflected in recruitment messaging, education and

awareness strategies, role modelling, our leadership and development programmes and the Downer Standards of Business Conduct,” she says.

The initiatives aimed to provide a pathway of opportunities within Downer. These ranged from giving rangatahi the chance to gain a Class 1 drivers license while still in school, through to assistance with qualifications, and developing leadership.

Cultural inclusion has been made a core part of Downer’s strategy. Diversity and being New Zealand inclusive have been identified as two of its five key Points of Difference.

“Strategic initiatives were developed to accelerate these Points of Difference, including an initiative to further build on and leverage the capability and success we developed in Māori leadership,” says Debbie.

Recognising the impact role modelling has within an organisation, diversity within leadership is a priority for Downer.

Two of the nine executive leadership team members are Māori, and the CEO is learning and champions te reo Māori. Senior leaders have whakatauki in their position descriptions and plans are in hand to progressively roll this through to all leadership position descriptions.

Overarching governance for the company’s Māori strategy and initiatives is provided by Ngā Kaitiaki o te Ara Whanake, the Māori Leadership Development Advisory Board whose vision is ‘To create an environment where Māori thrive’. This board is deliberate in its membership of a minimum of 50 per cent Māori representation, and includes three executive members, the Downer Kaumatua, rangatahi, wāhine and representatives from all Downer business units.

“Visible senior leadership support is critical,” says Debbie. “This has also had an impact at executive level where thinking about sustainability in particular, is being shaped by Māori concepts.”

**“We are building a workforce that is reflective of our local communities and of our values as a socially responsible organisation”**

## **THE AIM**

Downer wanted to create a culture where difference is communicated, celebrated and included, starting with equitable opportunities for Māori through representation and visible role modelling at leadership level.

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS**

- Programmes to ensure inclusion and equitable opportunities for Māori include:
  - Toa Takitini: for rangatahi still in school to gain a Class 1 drivers licence,
  - Whakatipu Tētēkura; employment at Downer for rangatahi
  - Te Whanake Timatanga; for qualifications
  - Te Whanake ki te Ora; for employment and maintaining abstinence from drugs
  - Te Ara Whanake for leadership development
  - Te Ara Whanake Wāhine Toa; to strengthen wāhine leadership
  - Te Ara Hou; for Māori facing employment and community reintegration challenges on release from custodial sentences
- Introduction of Te Ara Māramatanga, a 24-hour marae-based immersion programme for non-Māori leaders where they learn Māori tikanga and kawa, gain an understanding of the importance of tangata whenua and an

introduction to the Treaty of Waitangi and their obligations under this as both an individual and a Downer employee

- Unconscious bias awareness is included in a number of frontline leader programmes
- Own Different programme positions Downer as an organisation that embraces individuality and what makes its people and business unique



## RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Across the Downer workforce more than 24% of employees identify themselves as Māori. In some locations and business units the percentage is as high as 38%. The New Zealand average is 15%.
- The gender balance is 82% male and 18% female (up slightly from same time last year).
- Te Ara Whanake and Te Ara Māramatanga facilitators are previous programme participants, and alumni become mentors for the next programmes.
- Programmes have strengthened relationships with iwi, and this has seen an increase in opportunities for both parties.
- Downer has become acknowledged leaders in the area of developing cultural competence (Deloitte Top 200 Diversity & Inclusion Leadership Award, 2019 and HRNZ Diversity & Inclusion Award, 2020), and as part of a long-term commitment to Māori development has developed a strong partnership with Te Puni Kōkiri.

## KEY LEARNING

Diversity and inclusion initiatives must be genuine and connected to the organisation's business strategy and values.

**DO WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WELL AND DO WELL BECAUSE OF IT.**

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