



Diversity, equity and inclusion

About these guides

These practical guides explain important sustainability topics for businesses. Share them with the people in your organisation who are working together to meet your environmental, social and governance goals.

In a world where political, economic and social uncertainties are on the rise, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) might feel like just another challenge to juggle. But there's a catch. Creating a fair and inclusive workplace that reflects the rich diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand is not just the right thing to do - it's a smart move that drives real business results.



Guiding principle: Whanaungatanga – Connection, Belonging and Shared Responsibility

Whanaungatanga is the process of building and nurturing relationships. It is grounded in whakapapa (genealogy), which links people not just to one another, but also to whenua, awa, moana or any other significant place. In practice, whanaungatanga is about fostering belonging and responsibility – making sure everyone has their place, feels valued, and contributes to the collective.

In today's workplaces, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are modern expressions of whanaungatanga. They are about recognising the mana of every person and their lived experiences, removing barriers so all can succeed, and creating cultures where difference is celebrated as strength.

What is DEI?

DEI stands for diversity, equity and inclusion. These three ideas work together to help create a fair, respectful and welcoming workplace.

- **Diversity** is about the differences people bring. This includes things like ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability and cultural background. A diverse team brings a wide range of experiences, ideas and perspectives.
- **Equity** means making sure everyone has a fair go. It's about recognising that not everyone starts in the same place and creating opportunities for all.
- **Inclusion** is about making sure everyone feels welcome, respected and able to take part fully.

This is an important part of building workplaces that truly reflect and respect the communities we work in.

Why should your business care about DEI?

In Aotearoa New Zealand, DEI also means honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and embracing te ao Māori in how we do business. This is a smart move that reflects the communities we serve and strengthens our collective future.

Inclusive organisations do better. Research from [McKinsey & Company](#) shows that companies in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity are **36% more likely** to outperform their peers financially. Why? Because diverse teams bring fresh perspectives and make stronger decisions.

A [Boston Consulting Group study](#) found that companies with above-average diversity on their management teams saw **19% higher revenue** from innovation. When people with different backgrounds work together, they create an environment for new ideas.

Inclusive workplaces deliver measurable business benefits.

Business opportunity	Business Result
Improve financial performance	Companies with diverse leadership are more likely to succeed financially, benefiting from a wider range of insights and experiences.
Attract and retain staff	Inclusive workplaces attract job seekers, make for happier staff and reduce recruitment costs.
Boost innovation	Different perspectives allow for more creativity and better problem-solving.
Lift team engagement	People who feel included are more motivated and productive.
Earn your licence to operate	Earn ongoing approval from the local community and stakeholders
Reach more customers	A diverse team can better understand and connect with New Zealand's multicultural population.
Strengthen brand reputation	Being inclusive improves your brand image.
Avoid legal risks	Supports compliance with NZ's legal and ethical standards.
Earn / secure your licence to operate	Inclusive practice builds trust with local communities and stakeholders.



Dimensions of diversity

Diversity is about recognising and valuing the different experiences people bring to the table. This includes

› Cultural and ethnic diversity

Your people come from many different backgrounds: From tangata whenua to Pacific peoples, Asian communities and many others. Each may come with a set of beliefs, values, practices and traditions. In a workplace, this might look like respecting tikanga around meetings or food, or recognising different cultural holidays and practices (like time off needed for tangi/funerals).

› Gender

Making sure people of all genders have equal chances to grow and lead. It might include closing the gender pay gap, supporting flexible work for parents, or leadership programs for women and gender-diverse people.

› Rainbow / LGBTQIA+

Creating safe spaces for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This could look like having gender-neutral bathrooms, using inclusive language and showing visible support at relevant events.

› Age diversity

Every age group brings their own strengths. Young people bring fresh perspectives, and older team members bring experience. This could mean mentoring programmes or flexible roles for semi-retired professionals.

› Disability and accessibility

Allows that everyone can participate. This could look like wheelchair-friendly offices, assistive tech or flexible work-from-home options for those with invisible disabilities.

› Socioeconomic background

Not everyone starts from the same place. Supporting people from different economic backgrounds might include removing degree requirements from job ads, offering paid internships or supporting upskilling pathways.



Gender

The Women's Empowerment Principles Gender Gap Analysis Tool (WEPS Tool) helps businesses assess how well they're supporting gender equality across their workplace, customer interactions, and community involvement. It's designed for companies of all sizes and industries, anywhere in the world.

<https://weps-gapanalysis.org/>

DEI and Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The principles of partnership, participation and protection provide a foundation for inclusive workplaces:

- **Partnership** – Collaborate with Māori (local iwi or engage a professional to support this work) to shape inclusive policies and practices.
- **Participation** – Ensure Māori voices are present in governance, leadership and decision-making.
- **Protection** – Safeguard te reo Māori, tikanga, and cultural identity within your workplace.

Embedding these principles means DEI isn't just about representation – it's about creating workplaces where Māori and all cultural identities are honoured.



Frameworks to guide your DEI efforts

Framework	What it does	Good for
Te Tiriti o Waitangi Principles	Partnership, participation and protection guide meaningful engagement with tanagta whenua.	NZ-based organisations.
Ngā pou herenga	Foundational principles or values, anchors or pillars that guide behaviour, ethics, decision-making and engagement processes. These values form the "core Māori compass" in planning frameworks helping to bridge mātauranga Māori and Western systems	Any NZ organisation wanting to embrace te ao Māori in a practical way. Especially helpful for those working closely with Māori, including iwi, hapū, whanau groups.
Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix (AIM)	A local tool to assess and improve your DEI progress in the workplace.	Any NZ organisation wanting a practical DEI roadmap.
Te Uru Tāngata Centre for Workplace Inclusion	Offers templates, tools, and guides for building DEI strategies.	Getting started or improving your DEI policies and actions.
UN Global Compact	Provides guidance on DEI, human rights, non-discrimination and women's empowerment in business.	Businesses wanting to align with global best practice.
International Labour Organization (ILO)	Offers tools to promote fair and inclusive workplaces, with resources on ethnic diversity and disability.	HR teams and DEI leads in global or multinational contexts.
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Includes goals like gender equality, reduced inequalities, and inclusive communities.	Setting big-picture DEI goals linked to sustainability.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	Outlines basic rights like equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination.	Foundations for ethical business and fair treatment.



How to get started

Look at where you are now: Review your policies, recruitment data, pay gaps and staff survey results.

Set goals and get leadership backing: Start small but be clear: For example. “We will increase Māori representation in leadership by 20% in 3 years.”

Involve your team: Ask people what inclusion means to them. Co-design solutions with people with lived experience.

Build cultural capability: Offer training around Te Tiriti o Waitangi, unconscious bias, universal design and rainbow inclusion.

Adapt your systems: Review your recruitment, onboarding and performance systems to remove unintentional bias.



Making progress

Track and measure: Use anonymous surveys and demographic data to track progress.

Celebrate and share stories: Highlight role models and community days, but be mindful that staff who do cultural advising are valued and remunerated for this work.

Support employee-led groups: Help staff form rainbow, multicultural or women’s networks.

Stay curious: Encourage feedback, run regular kōrero and listening sessions.

Don’t tick boxes: Real inclusion takes time and needs genuine commitment. Solutions are best co-developed with those affected.



Leading the way

Make DEI part of your strategy: Embed inclusion in your business plan, values and leadership KPIs.

Partner with Māori: Work with iwi and hapū to reflect mana whenua perspectives. Be mindful and humble. If you don’t know how to build this relationship, look for a professional service who can support you.

Pay the living wage: Support equity by ensuring fair pay across your workforce.

Use inclusive procurement: Buy from Māori, Pasifika, social enterprise or disability-owned businesses.

Be transparent: Share your DEI goals, actions and progress publicly.

Looking ahead

Expect to respond to change even more quickly in future. Anticipate emerging issues and how these will affect your stakeholders and business and build this into your strategy. ‘Dynamic material assessments’ will help you.

About us

The **Sustainable Business Council (SBC)** is a CEO-led membership organisation that mobilises over 130 ambitious businesses to build a thriving and sustainable future for all.

thinkstep-anz is an independent trans-Tasman sustainability firm. We offer a full range of sustainability services and specialise in plain English sustainability communications and design. thinkstep-anz’s sustainability communicators have written this guide.

Kaitiaki Collective promotes transformational thinking through sustainability, environmental and stakeholder engagement. We reflect whakaaro me mātauranga Māori in everything we do.

More information

You’ll find the other guides in this series here:
sbc.org.nz/sustainability-toolkit

Thanks to the member organisations who supported this work: Chapman Tripp, KiwiRail, Plant & Food Research, SkyCity, Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA), Westpac, WSP.