

Empowerment Award Entrant: AECOM



Since engineering firm AECOM introduced a comprehensive Gender Diversity Strategy in 2014, the company has set significant new benchmarks within its industry.

The initiatives have included gender pay adjustments, topping up compulsory parental leave benefits and increasing the number of women in management and governance roles. The strategy's initiatives have charted a new era at AECOM – one in which women are empowered in the workplace and paid equitably, their talent pool is diversified, and people are supported to succeed in their careers, whatever path they choose

The strategy, led by AECOM's Chief Executive Australia New Zealand Lara Poloni and HR Director Helen Fraser, has comprised seven focus areas: 1. Unconscious bias, 2. Gender targets, 3. Gender pay, 4. Flexibility, 5. Influencing industry, 6. External hiring and 7. Career development

One of the most impactful streams of the programme has been in gender pay. It has resulted in 11 per cent of AECOM's female workforce receiving a gender pay adjustment. The adjustment totalled five per cent of the company's total salary budget.

Significantly, 68 per cent of the gender pay adjustment was allocated to females in the 'Professional' classifications which is the pipeline of future leaders. Overall, AECOM is pleased to have achieved a reduction in the gender pay gap of 1.9 per cent – and says there is still plenty more to be done.

Gender equity is a challenging area within the engineering industry, where there are few female engineers in technical leader, management and governance roles. Through gender equity initiatives, between 2013 and 2016, the number of women in Director positions in New Zealand has increased from 10 to 16, while during the same period the pipeline of females to Director roles increased from 82 to 125.

Looking ahead, by the end of this year, AECOM is aiming for more than 15 per cent of its Director level roles across Australia and New Zealand to be filled by women. And it wants to increase female representation at senior leadership level to 17 per cent by the end of 2018, and 20 per cent by the end of 2020. (According to the Professional Engineers (IPENZ) only 12.6 per cent of senior management positions were held by women in New Zealand in 2015).

As part of the external hiring focus, AECOM has addressed the need to attract more women into senior roles, by proactively identifying female candidates for senior vacancies, and has recently a collated database of female senior leaders in the industry.

AECOM has also boosted its support of parents. In 2015, the company implemented a market leading approach to Parental Leave. In addition to the Government's partial contribution of 18 weeks' pay, it offers employees a full salary top up and provides an additional two weeks' leave at full pay, totalling 20 weeks' paid Parental Leave. This is supplemented by ongoing Kiwisaver contributions and accrual of annual leave while the person is on Parental Leave.

To improve flexibility, AECOM recently launched a comprehensive toolkit for managers and employees around managing flexible work practices successfully, and outlining its approach to flexibility and how it can work for everybody. It has abolished start and finish times and removed policy and procedure.

Lara Poloni comments: "We must dispel the perception that accessing flexible work arrangements negatively affects career progression. Throughout my career with AECOM, I've accessed a number of flexible working arrangements and continue to do so today - as do many senior leaders across Australia New Zealand."

AECOM has delivered unconscious bias training to hiring managers, and more widely through the organisation via our core leadership development programmes and as part of its Graduate training programme - Growing Professional Skills. There is also unconscious bias training available to anyone who wishes to undertake it through the online AECOM University programme.

Under the Influencing Industry focus AECOM worked to reach out to young women by a 'STEAM Ahead' Mothers and Daughters event in partnership with Futureintech and supports the Women in Engineering Network at Auckland University.

Alongside the seven focus areas, there are a range of other activities for employees designed to increase gender diversity awareness and empowerment. As a global partner of International Women's Day, in 2015 and 2016 AECOM held panel discussions with internal

and external speakers to enable employees to voice opinions on the subject of gender diversity, to talk openly about progress, raise concerns and highlight areas where the company could be doing better.

AECOM's work is not done. Scheduled for this year is an Inclusive Leadership training programme across the business. The pilot has commenced in Australia, and extending this into New Zealand will further embed the inclusive culture across AECOM's business.