



Downer New Zealand

CULTURAL CELEBRATION FINALIST



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VIDEO**

THE STORY

Opening meetings with a mihi and using te reo and tikanga Māori in everyday interactions are new strands to Downer New Zealand's DNA.

The company is proud of its New Zealand history and employs 12,000 people providing services across several sectors including transportation, telecommunications, facilities management, hospitality, laundries, water, open spaces and energy.

In 2017 Downer developed a business strategy around growth and sustainability that identified five points of difference; New Zealand Inc., Engagement and Growth of our People, Right Partners, Easy to Work With/For, and Diversity.

The cultural competence initiative was developed to strengthen both New Zealand Inc and Diversity, with the intention of embracing the company's heritage and culture, and integrating aspects of te reo and tikanga Māori in interactions with employees, customers and business partners.

Specific goals included embracing diverse cultures, recognising that Downer's large government client base has a requirement to work in partnership with Māori and increasing its capability would be helpful, and enhancing established relationships with Iwi through existing employment and development programmes. Additionally, recognising that Māori make up 24 per cent of the Downer Transport Services workforce, it was important to attract and retain Māori in a tight labour market.

Cultural competence activities built on a foundation created by Te Ara Whanake, a Māori Leadership programme developed three years earlier focussing on developing Māori leaders in a Māori context. General Manager Human Resources Transport Services Debbie Kirby says that through the nine-month programme, participants have strengthened their Māori identity and been empowered to role model this within both the organisation and their communities.

“The success of Te Ara Whanake, which is a multi-award winning programme, has provided the catalyst for broader culturally-focused programmes. Its core principles provide the foundation for all cultural competence activities to ensure alignment across the organisation,” she says.

“A large number of Māori leaders have started learning te reo and have extended this learning opportunity to their fellow workmates and whanau.”

While non-Māori leaders have always been invited to participate in Te Ara Whanake, growing demand for the programme led to the development of a new programme, Te Ara Maramatanga. This 24-hour marae-based immersion programme is designed and facilitated by Downer employees. It includes powhiri, tikanga, waiata, Te Whare Tapa Wha model, an introduction to the Treaty of Waitangi and poroporoaki.

In launching the programme, CEO Steve Killen said, “As we are a growing diverse business, I want our senior leaders to be more informed and educated when it comes to Māori protocols, culture and history.”

Both programmes have been embraced by senior leadership, who have attended themselves and showed support for participants, and are overseen by Nga Kaitiaki o te Ara Whanake, Downer’s Maori Leadership Development Advisory Board. The Board was created at the same time as Gabe Moana was introduced as Downer Kaumatua. It is made up of 10 members from across all Downer business streams and includes three Downer Executives as well as Gabe and two participants from the very first pilot Te Ara Whanake programme.

Cultural competency initiatives have been included in key leadership events, and a full-time role has been established to support all the activities that have grown out of the programmes. Feedback from staff has been positive. “A fabulous experience and one that helped my understanding of Māoridom in general, but also the Downer connection and its importance to our business. I really felt connected,” says a Te Ara Maramatanga participant

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THE CHALLENGE

In strengthening its commitment to diversity, its New Zealand heritage, its significant Māori workforce, and partnerships, Downer New Zealand wanted to integrate te reo and tikanga Māori into its day-to-day interactions with its people, customers and business partners.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Te Ara Whanake, a Māori leadership development programme was introduced to give Māori leaders a deeper understanding of history, culture and tikanga.

- Te Ara Maramatanga, a parallel initiative was developed for non-Māori. It allows participants to experience Māori culture in a 24-hour marae-based immersion programme.



- A full-time role was established to support all the activity associated with the cultural competency initiatives
- A Downer Kaumatua was recognised by the CEO and plays a key role in all Māori development activities.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Te Ara Whanake has been running for five years and had 197 participants.
- In the past year, 12 out of 40 have been promoted into more senior roles.
- Te Ara Maramatanga and other cultural immersion events are significantly increasing cultural understanding.
- Programmes have the added benefit of providing opportunities to connect with colleagues and build relationships.
- People who participate in the programmes have a higher retention rate
- Industry reaction has been very positive.

“I am impressed Downer is putting so much energy into this sort of programme. Its gives meaning to working for the company. Thank you.” Participant in the Te Ara Maramatanga programme.

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