

Jacobs

DIVERSE TALENT

MEDIUM-LARGE ORGANISATION FINALIST



THE STORY

Jacobs has committed to an aspirational gender balance goal to drive gender equality and accelerate the representation and advancement of women across its workforce through changes to its talent acquisition processes.

Jacobs provides a range of professional services including consulting, technical, scientific and project delivery for the government and private sector. The global organisation has around 450 staff in Aotearoa supporting clients in the historically male-dominated infrastructure industry.

With research showing the benefits of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) quantified into bottom-line value, a global review was undertaken to evaluate Jacobs' progress in all areas of DEI. This highlighted a key area that needed attention was attracting and retaining women of all disciplines and seniority at Jacobs. The number of females in leadership positions across the ANZ region sat at 14 per cent in 2019.

Jacobs responded to this by committing to a gender balance goal of 40:40:20. This initiative aims to deliver a workforce that is 40 per cent female, 40 per cent male, and 20 per cent any gender by 2025.

Senior Talent Acquisition Partner Clare Kitching says, "For Jacobs, our aspirational 40:40:20 goal holds as much weight as our financial goals do. We hold ourselves publicly accountable for our progress across the company, at every level of the organisation."

They began working towards this goal by focusing on understanding the needs of female staff. Senior leaders interviewed all female employees in New Zealand to understand and map the key barriers they face. Insights gained through this contributed to strategies targeted at both removing roadblocks in the recruitment process, and providing opportunities to empower and develop women within the business.

To shift the gender balance of recruitment, the talent acquisition team implemented changes aimed at creating greater confidence in applying and attracting a more diverse pool of talent. They reframed job listings to resonate with women better, using software to improve the inclusivity of language used and limiting the number of listed prerequisites, based on research that reveals women are less likely to apply for roles unless they meet all the selection criteria. The team created female talent pools to draw from, and proactively sourced female candidates.

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“Robust recruitment processes removed unconscious biases, ensuring a level playing field for all candidates,” says Clare.

Adjusting the company culture to attract and retain women meant creating an environment that was supportive and inclusive to all. Key initiatives included 12 weeks paid parental leave for all staff, support for fertility journeys and pregnancy loss, domestic abuse policy and menopause awareness toolkits and support. Jacobs launched myFlex, a flexible workplace policy for all staff needs, regardless of reason. These initiatives and benefits are showcased during recruitment drives, onboarding processes and through employee career journeys to encourage retention.

“Flexible work allows me to juggle my professional commitments alongside family time. It’s an invaluable arrangement that means I don’t miss out on important events and experiences as my three children grow up,” says Clare.

Various employee network groups and targeted training programmes address deep-rooted biases and support leaders with tools as well as providing opportunities for development and valuable relationship building. These include programmes which equip men to be advocates for equity, and a platform for women to connect with senior leaders, explore career strategies, and learn from peers’ experiences.

“Equitable access to training fostered an environment promoting career advancement for all,” says Clare.

It was essential that this initiative was led from the top, with visible support from the board and championing from the CEO. Responsibility for achieving the goal sits with managers at all levels, with targets embedded in annual reports, business goals and regular reporting to ensure equal pay and progress in reducing gender pay gaps.

“While metrics underscore our 40:40:20 progress, the genuine measure of success emanates from the lived experiences of employees who have accessed our supportive benefits, immersed themselves in our developmental training, and flourished professionally at Jacobs.

THE CHALLENGE

Jacobs wanted to adjust the company culture to attract and retain more women and remove roadblocks to professional progression for women, aiming to achieve a 40:40:20 gender balance.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Pursuing the hiring, retention and development of women by focusing on understanding their needs and developing tailored solutions.
- Accountability for the initiative at all levels of the business, including championing from the senior leadership.
- Using metrics to embed accountability and ensure sustainability of the goal.



RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Overall representation of women in the business increased from 28% to 33% in the last year, and in key management positions from 36% to 39.7% in the same period – up from 14% five years ago.
- Jacobs has seen a 61% increase in male employees taking parental leave, enabling shared care.
- 42% of participants in leadership learning projects in the past two years were women.
- In the latest culture pulse survey, 86.7% of staff say they are comfortable being themselves at work.
- Jacobs was recognised in 2018/2019 as a Best Practice Employer in New Zealand with a YWCA Equal Pay Best Practice Compact, and continues to publicly acknowledge the importance of annual pay equity analysis and actions.

KEY LEARNING

Setting clear targets with regular reporting and public accountability ensures progress and drives action in delivering gender-related DEI initiatives.