

Case study: elevating women in STEM



Aurecon



Professional,
Scientific and
Technical Services



3,050
employees



36%
female



64%
male

Challenge

Aurecon is an engineering, design and infrastructure advisory company that wants to continue to improve the gender balance of its workforce.

Demand for technical and STEM skills is high in the current market. As Aurecon seeks to solve problems with clients that are complex and multi-dimensional, this demand will continue to grow. Aurecon has recognised the importance of increasing diversity to strengthen its business operations and connect with untapped talent. Concurrently, Aurecon is building an inclusive culture to support all employees to feel valued, have a sense of belonging and have equal access to opportunities. Aurecon sees this as the key to high employee satisfaction, engagement and high commercial performance.

In 2017, women represented 29% of Aurecon's total workforce, with much lower percentages at middle and senior levels.

Aurecon decided to increase female representation by taking a range of actions from recruitment through to progression and retention. Many of these actions are also benefiting other areas of diversity, as disrupting systems reduces bias overall.

Strategy

Whilst ensuring the focus remained on a broad definition of diversity and inclusion, Aurecon implemented a plan to specifically improve the gender balance of its workforce, particularly in professional roles, technical roles and in leadership positions. The strategic focus included leadership, policies, language and behaviour, and targets.

Actions

Aurecon's most senior leaders, Global CEO William Cox and Australia and New Zealand Managing Director Louise Adams, prioritise diversity and inclusion in the business' strategy through language, action and investment.

Aurecon's policies have all been reviewed to ensure they are gender neutral and explicitly inclusive. Three policies support gender diversity and inclusion in particular: 'all roles flex' flexible working, parental leave and domestic and family violence.

The most important influence on organisational culture is language and behaviour. Progressive policies are ineffective unless employees see senior leaders role modelling them and bringing them to life, for example working flexibly and taking parental leave. The way leaders and team members interact day-to-day, the language they use and the way leaders make decisions and share their time and attention also affects equal or unequal treatment and access to opportunities.

Aurecon supports inclusive language and behaviours through inclusive leadership training, the use of Diversity Council Australia and Aurecon's Words@Work research and the Leadership Shadow tool (created by Male Champions of Change and Chief Executive Women).

In 2017, Aurecon set targets for total workforce and mid-level management to shine a light on barriers to equality. The targets were for female representation of the workforce to increase to 35% by 2021, with 15% at Level 7 and 20% at Level 8.

Aurecon continued with its leadership program, Ascend, which is designed specifically to empower and support Aurecon's high potential women to use strengths-based leadership to determine and navigate their own unique path to achieving their potential.

Outcomes

- Achieved national workforce target of 35% female representation by 2019 and adjusted the target for 2021 to 40%
- Moved from 12% to 18% at level 7 and from 10% to 18% at level 8 (operations only)
- 238 women have completed the Ascend program of which 42% have since been promoted from 2017 and 2018 intakes
- 88% of Aurecon's female employees and 91% of male employees say they have the flexibility they need to manage work and other commitments
- The proportion of paid parental leave taken by men has increased from 7% to 40% since the new policy was introduced in late 2017
- 1000 line managers have attended foundation inclusive leadership training
- More than 140 senior leaders have attended advanced inclusive leadership training.

Visit www.wgea.gov.au to learn about employer best practice and download practical tools to improve gender equality in your workplace.

Drill down into our data at data.wgea.gov.au to compare how industries are performing on gender equality.

Employee experience

Lauren Thompson has always been fascinated by how things work. Her aptitude for problem solving saw her excel in maths and science at school and encouraged her to take on a degree in engineering. She joined Aurecon two years ago as a Systems Engineer and undertook the Ascend leadership program, which focuses on supporting women into leadership positions. She has since been promoted and manages a small team in rail services.

"I love the constant challenge and opportunities engineering brings. Every day on the job I am learning new things and being faced with new situations. I particularly enjoy working in rail because everyone interacts with rail and public transport, it's something that has a real impact on the community. At the end of the day when I step back, it's something that really drives me, seeing how your work can positively impact broader society."

"I work in a male dominated field, but the leadership team really embodies Aurecon's focus on diversity and inclusion. At Aurecon, I haven't experienced many challenges being a woman in a male dominated workforce and that's not by accident. The efforts that Aurecon is putting in to inclusion and diversity, including having leaders who really believe that it is an important business issue, is really making a difference to the culture."

"In my first year at Aurecon I applied to participate in the Ascend program, a program that supports women who are interested in moving into leadership roles. Ascend helped me understand my values, my leadership style and how I could use these to lead in an impactful way".



“One of the exercises we completed was to identify our values and strengths and analyse these against our current goals. This helped me understand how I can tailor a situation or role to better suit, or understand why I might be struggling with something.”

“One of the most valuable things that the Ascend program provided me was a network of up and coming women who have the same mindset that I do. I now have a supportive group of like-minded people that I can check in with, connect with and ask questions of.”

“Aurecon has also introduced policies that make it easy to attract a diverse workforce, like inclusive parental leave and flexible working policies. Aurecon encourages both women and men to take parental leave. If both genders have the opportunity to take parental leave, this removes the perception that women are more likely to take time away from the office or take breaks from their career. I do see leaders at Aurecon really encouraging flexible working, this helps women and men feel like engineering and STEM is the sort of industry that can support all their commitments in life”.

“It’s important to attract more women into STEM as the industry is adapting and changing to user centred design and designing to innovate. This comes with a shift in mentality as to who can be an engineer and what the future engineer looks like. As technology progresses and we move away from a focus on technical skills to a focus on user centred design, we need to attract more women into the field to reflect the communities we are designing for”.



“By having diverse designers and a focus on user centred design, we’re not just designing things, we’re designing things for people”

Visit www.wgea.gov.au to learn about employer best practice and download practical tools to improve gender equality in your workplace.

Drill down into our data at data.wgea.gov.au to compare how industries are performing on gender equality.