Westpac Group is made up of some of Australia’s most recognised financial services brands, including Westpac, St.George, Bank of Melbourne, BankSA, BT Financial Group and RAMS.

The company believes that workplace diversity is about diversity of thought – where different perspectives and capabilities are a point of difference, rather than visible characteristics.

Inclusion is the extent to which employees feel included and valued, and through its strategic focus on this, Westpac Group is harnessing the collective intelligence of its diverse employees to fuel the innovation of thought and ideas and make it one of the world’s great service companies, helping customers, communities and people to prosper and grow.
When Westpac Group ran its first employee Diversity Survey in 2010, one of the outcomes was that while employees believed that the organisation had made good progress in advancing the Diversity agenda but that they wanted to play more of a role in creating outcomes that impacted our people and customers. The result was the establishment of Employee Action Groups (EAG) across the various diversity streams.

Each EAG is provided with a small, annual operating budget. To ensure the success and traction of these networks, an Executive Sponsorship model was established by aligning each group with a member of the Executive Team. A common governance and operating structure was designed and established by the Inclusion & Diversity team to ensure consistency and operational efficiency across the groups.

Each group follows a pyramid structure – lead by a core Executive Committee and steered by a Chair; working groups of members delivering initiatives and a broader membership base of business champions.

Empowered, results-driven Employee Action Groups

Westpac Group’s Inclusion & Diversity team manages eight Employee Action Groups (EAGs) across the various streams of diversity including:

- ABLE (accessibility)
- Asian Leadership
- Brothers & Sisters (Indigenous Australians)
- FLEX (flexibility)
- GLOBAL (LGBTI)
- Prime of Life (50+)
- WOW (Women in Leadership) and
- Youth (under 30s).

Over 6,300 employees are members of EAGs where they volunteer to champion their particular agenda and act as advocates in their respective business areas.

Each EAG is sponsored and provided top-down support by a member of the Westpac Group Executive Team and outcomes are reported quarterly through the Inclusion & Diversity Council which is chaired by the CEO.

These networks are strategically aligned with the Group’s Inclusion & Diversity strategy and focus on creating results for their members. Each EAG translates the strategy to meet the needs of its members. Some are more focused on creating education and networking events, while others focus on changing the culture around inclusion or on embedding inclusion practices into business as usual.

Overview

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Monitoring

The achievements and outcomes achieved by each of the EAGs are reported at the quarterly Westpac Group Inclusion & Diversity Council. The EAG Executive Committees are changed and voted in annually to ensure fresh ideas and perspectives are brought into the groups and to allow a number of people to assume management positions such as Chair, Deputy Chair, and Treasurer etc.

At the start of every financial year the EAGs submit their new strategy and plan for the year ahead to ensure they remain current and are delivering on identified business needs.

Outcomes achieved

Westpac Group’s support of the EAGs, together with the Inclusion & Diversity team, isn’t just making a difference to its business but has also been recognised as best-practice in the industry:

- ABLE won the AHRI 2014 Disability Employment Award and 2013 National Disability Award for Excellence in Employment Outcomes
- 2014 Best Employer International for 50+ Employees – AARP
- GLOBAL won the ‘best LGBTI network’ award
- BT Financial Group CEO Brad Cooper was recognised as Executive Sponsor of the Year at the 2015 AWEI Awards. The Westpac Group achieved an overall ranking of 2nd place and the best performing bank.

The company’s 2014 Diversity Survey showed that 48% of employees have a better understanding of the importance of their focus on diversity and inclusion because of campaigns led by the Employee Actions Groups. It was also found that a further 32% of people benefitted from the resources or tools that have been created.

The 2015 International Women’s Day campaign is another example of the Inclusion & Diversity team and the Women of Westpac EAG working together to deliver the Make It Happen campaign. Over 50 events were held during March which 94% of attendees reported as valuable; 13 articles on the Group’s intranet news page were published and 30 employee profiles were viewed over 41,700 times and over $40,000 raised for Care Australia.

There’s also a deeply personal impact for employees as Ashley Gray, Head of Innovation, Strategy & Digital for St.George Banking Group and member of the GLOBAL EAG explains: “For me personally as a gay man, my diversity isn’t just tolerated, it’s celebrated. This means I truly bring my whole self to work. I’m engaged, I’m motivated and I’m passionate about doing my best.

As a result, I’ve been at Westpac Group for less than two years, but I’ve had the opportunity to do three fantastic roles. These have ranged from running the St.George Foundation right through to developing our digital strategy, and I firmly believe that these opportunities have come about due to me truly being able to be my whole self at work.”

The ABLE EAG has been working to ensure that accessibility is intuitively embedded throughout the organisation. For example, their consultation with the Group Property area has seen best-practice intuitive accessibility design rolled out in new building developments such as 150 Collins Street in Melbourne, as well as the new Sydney corporate office being built at Barangaroo.
Lessons learnt

• Senior support is essential to embed change and that’s why the Executive Sponsor model is successful.
• While you can have a common governance model, each EAG has its individual nuances based on the particular subject area. For example, WOW is focused on providing career and development opportunities for women, while ABLE is focused on embedding accessibility into the design of all products and services.
• Campaigns are effective tools to grow education and understanding of the particular agendas. For example, GLOBAL uses IDAHOT Day every year to enhance understanding of LGBTI inclusion.
• Get the right people in the right roles in the Executive Committees – it’s a mix of both passion and the right skills to influence, plan and take action.

Plans for the future

EAGs are an important part of building an inclusive and diverse culture at Westpac Group and linking employees to customers and communities. Giving them more opportunities to deliver outcomes that are strategically aligned with its Inclusion & Diversity agenda will remain a priority.

Growing the group’s memberships and ensuring all its employees know they can play a role in creating a workplace where people can bring their best selves to work every day will also be important. Westpac Group knows its model works as the EAGs aren’t just talking about inclusion and diversity, they’re taking action to embed it in the business.