

# Diversity Policy

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## Main Points

The DIA commits to recognise, respect and value diversity and to adopt a goal of all designers having equal access to the organisation and its opportunities.

Diversity in terms of differences between people – such as age, gender, ability, appearance, experience or differences in preferences and styles of thinking and working – has immense value to:

- the DIA as an organisation
- the design sector.
- the broader community.

The DIA accepts that there are distinct demographic groups that have long been disadvantaged.

Further, the DIA acknowledges that some designers may have felt that they were not included or that their views and approach were not valued.

The aim of this policy is to build a culture that values and celebrates the unique talents and contributions of all designers through integrating inclusion and diversity principles in all aspects of the DIA.

## The Issue

Australia is becoming more diverse. The social and professional selves of the population graduating from university today cover a considerably broader range than those of their grandparents' generations. As cultural norms shift over time organisations can find themselves lagging behind the expectations of their members, partners and clients.

Diversity has not always been actively pursued as a goal by the DIA, so the organisation has not fully enjoyed its many benefits and may not have appeared as inclusive as it should have.

When we don't set diversity as a goal we're unlikely to recognise how we can increase it. If we don't experience discrimination ourselves, we may not be aware that some people may not see design as a career where they can flourish and reach their potential, and we may be unintentionally contributing to barriers to their participation. Some designers may not feel free to express their full identities. We may be missing out on countless innovative designs by people discouraged from the profession.

Similarly, as human-centred professionals, what unfair biases are we unwittingly incorporating into our designs? We may be consciously avoiding racism or sexism in language or images, but we now also know that even technology is not neutral. For example, AI embodies the views of the people who design it and algorithmic bias stemming from a lack of diversity can create unfair outcomes. This illustrates that how we think about diversity and inclusion can change over time.

The DIA will be truly effective as a national peak body representing professional designers in all disciplines across Australia when diversity is embedded as an ongoing commitment by us all.

## What Should Change

The DIA needs to be an organisation open to and comprised of designers from all backgrounds and experiences. The sector should join with the DIA in embracing diversity in all its forms and rejecting discrimination based on differences between people. Individual businesses should review their practices to identify barriers that may be limiting their inclusiveness. We need to examine pathways into our profession and promote design as a career to a diverse population. We should all work towards creating a sector that reflects the rich diversity of our communities.

Sole traders can also play a role in building a more diverse sector. There may be opportunities among your partners, clients and suppliers, or your own practice could provide a valuable difference to others.

The DIA invites members and the broader design community to join us in recognising, respecting and valuing diversity. We will do this by:

- Starting with a diversity assessment, and checking in on our workplace culture regularly.
- Identifying and addressing structural barriers to participation in DIA activities to ensure no unintended bias.
- Engaging designers from diverse groups and creating safe and welcoming environments free of discrimination and appreciative of differences.
- Listening with respect to different viewpoints and encouraging the free exchange of ideas.
- Choosing to invite others to join us at their own pace in being more inclusive and avoiding labels and judgement.
- Looking for unconscious bias in recruitment processes, and being aware of pitfalls such as positioning an individual as a token representative for a group of people. We will consider what strategies are needed to ensure new hires in the sector can thrive, such as using DIA networks to connect to mentors.
- Seeking like-minded partners and sharing successful strategies.

## Benefits of Change

Diversity has extensive, measurable benefits to organisations, demonstrated in numerous studies. There is irrefutable evidence that benefits include more innovation, better insights to markets, higher productivity, increased profitability, improved staff attraction and retention and better problem solving. It is self-evident that workers who feel validated and important will be more productive and motivated.

Recent research has also highlighted that increased diversity bestows flexibility and adaptability on organisations, which in turn has given them a competitive edge in weathering changing markets.

Aside from these commercial benefits, diversity and cultural capability are attributes that help anchor organisations in their communities.

Also, worker and client expectations of businesses are evolving to include social aspects. Inclusive organisations are not only viewed more positively but will in time be the standard that is demanded.

## Next Steps and What We Need to Do

The DIA will take practical measures to increase diversity and inclusiveness, including through seeking out and supporting historically underrepresented designers to participate in decision making processes and events, ensuring awards programs are open to all designers and judged free of bias, modifying systems to allow members to choose their preferred form of address, rebutting negative stereotypes, and implementing clear complaint procedures.

As a workplace the DIA is also investing in training and processes to build competency to uphold this policy and fostering an environment that supports learning and appreciation of differences.

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We encourage members and the sector more broadly to join with the DIA in building a more diverse and inclusive industry. The changes outlined above are a starting point. In addition, we can all encourage other professions we work with to value diversity.

This policy applies across the DIA:

- people – members, paid staff, and volunteers serving in governance positions
- presence and resources – the DIA website, the DA and DIA brands, social media accounts and DIA business practices, systems and processes.

It should be read in conjunction with other DIA policies including the Indigenous Design Charter.

## Questions or Suggestions

The DIA is committed to a design approach to policy development. We develop policy positions collaboratively to reflect the concerns of design professionals across the country. If you would like to engage with us on this topic we have staff based around the country or you can call or email the National Office team. We would like to hear from you about whether we have got this right. Do you have queries about what we're asking of you? Would the proposed change help you? What more can be done? Do you want to help?

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## About us

The Design Institute of Australia (DIA) is the peak professional association for designers and design businesses in Australia, representing professionals in all design disciplines for over sixty years. The DIA is run by and funded by designers for designers. The DIA champions design and design thinking as a central element in a flourishing digital economy and a sustainable future and believes that Australia's highly skilled and innovative design community offers the prospect of solutions to the world's most pressing problems, as well as ways to make everyday life more comfortable and enjoyable.