TE URU TĀNGATA
Centre for Workplace Inclusion

DIVERSITY AWARDS NZ 2026

CASE STUDY

Air New Zealand

Employee Networks Award Winner



Air New Zealand has developed a mature and integrated employee network ecosystem, bringing together 10 networks to collectively advance inclusion across culture, gender, disability and identity.

“A key barrier facing our people was fragmentation across a large, dispersed workforce. Our networks were working in isolation, events were competing for attention, and inclusion was seen as something ‘extra’ rather than integral to how we work,” says Senior People Specialist (EX) Robynne Sam.

To address this, Air New Zealand reframed inclusion as a collective movement rather than individual advocacy. In 2024, its 10 Employee Networks came together under a unified framework, with shared governance, funding, and collaboration goals. This shift encouraged cross-network planning, enabling diverse groups to learn from one another and amplify impact rather than duplicate effort.

For example, the Manu and KASIA Networks partnered to host a joint Matariki Market, blending Māori and Asian cultural celebrations in a way that modelled inclusion in action. Likewise, the Women's, WINGS, WISE, and Women in Digital Networks formed a quarterly alliance, identifying shared priorities such as International Women's Day and Money Month for Wāhine to advance gender equity collectively.

“This collaborative approach broke down long-standing barriers between identity groups, creating space for intersectionality, where gender, culture, disability and sexuality are acknowledged as connected, not separate,” Robynne says.

Collaboration and shared learning are strengthened through biannual Employee Network Roundtables and monthly steering committees, where network co-leads share insights, resources and best practice. Leadership development pathways and cross-network mentoring further build capability and connection across the networks.

“Cultural capability is now a shared responsibility, sustained through policy, partnerships and people.”

This collective expertise has also informed wider organisational practice, including inclusive event design, accessible communications and policy reform.

“What began as individual voices advocating for representation has become a connected, strategic force that drives lasting organisational change.”

A tangible impact has been a 60 per cent rise in overall network engagement in 2024-25, alongside new measures of belonging in employee surveys that show marked improvement in psychological safety and visibility of under-represented groups.

“Beyond metrics, there's been a cultural shift. Inclusion is now woven into leadership conversations, business strategy, and daily interactions,” says Robynne.

“By connecting our networks, we've created a self-sustaining ecosystem where inclusion is everyone's responsibility, ensuring Air New Zealand continues to embody manaakitanga and lead as an employer of choice.”

Te Uru Tāngata Centre for Workplace Inclusion Chief Executive Maretha Smit says Air New Zealand has demonstrated a mature evolution of employee networks from grassroots groups into a coordinated system of influence.

“What is particularly compelling is the deliberate move away from fragmentation toward a connected, strategic model, enabling networks to amplify impact rather than compete for attention.

“This positions employee networks not as peripheral activities, but as a core mechanism for cultural change and employee experience, with influence extending beyond the organisation into customers and the wider sector. The combination of scale, coherence, and innovation makes this a strong contender for system-level inclusion leadership.”





Strategies for success



- Brought 10 Employee Networks together under a unified framework.
- Established shared governance, funding and collaboration goals.
- Created regular Roundtables and steering committees for cross-network learning and planning.
- Introduced leadership development pathways and cross-network mentoring.
- Encouraged networks to collaborate on shared priorities and initiatives.
- Used collective network expertise to inform policies, communications and event design

Results and benefits

- Overall Employee Network engagement increased by more than 60 per cent in 2024-25.
- Employee surveys show improved psychological safety and visibility of under-represented groups.
- Cross-network collaboration has reduced duplication and amplified the impact of network initiatives.
- The Women's, WINGS, WISE and Women in Digital Networks now collaborate quarterly on shared gender equity priorities.
- Network collaboration has influenced inclusive event design, accessible communications and policy reform.
- Inclusion is increasingly embedded in leadership conversations, business strategy and everyday interactions.