

Community

Community

Relations Plan



Multicultural Affairs Queensland – Department of the Premier and Cabinet

Queensland Community Relations Plan

The Queensland Community Relations Plan was endorsed by the
Queensland Government in September 1999.

Community Participation

Foreword

My Government is committed to the continued development of Queensland as an inclusive, harmonious and cohesive society.

The cornerstone of this commitment is the building of stronger community relations across the State.

This Queensland Community Relations Plan has been developed under the Multicultural Queensland Policy and is an integral part of my Government's approach to the management of cultural diversity. Its development follows wide consultation across Government agencies and community groups.

The Plan provides a coordinated Government strategy to promote and foster a positive community relations environment in Queensland.

Implementation of the Plan will benefit all Queenslanders with outcomes including a broader acceptance and understanding of diversity in the community; reduction in levels of discrimination and prejudice; and increased awareness of rights, responsibilities and opportunities of citizenship.

Progress towards building an environment that supports a better understanding of the principles of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians, as well as valuing the diversity that exists in our regional communities, are just some areas which will also benefit from implementation of this Plan.

I commend the Queensland Community Relations Plan to you as blueprint to further enhance the strong sense of community that exists in our State.

Peter Beattie MLA
Premier



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Queensland Community Relations Plan

Introduction

The Queensland Community Relations Plan has been developed under the Multicultural Queensland Policy and is an integral part of the Queensland Government's approach to the management of cultural diversity. It identifies key strategies and actions designed to sustain and promote positive community relations in Queensland.

Why a Community Relations Plan?

There are many reasons why a coordinated plan to improve community relations is necessary. These include the need to:

- demonstrate strong government leadership to promote the continuing development of Queensland as an inclusive, harmonious, cohesive society;
- support reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians;
- foster an environment that will allow Queensland to maximise all its advantages, including the advantage of diversity, to create more jobs and to compete more effectively in the global market;
- build stronger regions and to build stronger relations between Government and diverse regional communities;
- build a safer, more supportive community for all Queenslanders including those vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice;

Objective

The objective of the Community Relations Plan is to foster a positive community relations environment in Queensland in which diversity is accepted and valued.

Outcomes

In pursuit of the objective outlined above, the plan adopts a broad range of strategies designed to have the following specific community relations outcomes:

- broader acceptance and understanding of diversity in the community;
- reduction in levels of discrimination and prejudice;
- increased appreciation of the value of positive community relations;
- broader participation from the community in planning and promoting positive community relations;
- increased community capacity to address community relations issues;
- increased awareness of rights, responsibilities and opportunities of citizenship in an inclusive, harmonious and cohesive society.

The broad approach adopted by the plan is also expected to produce positive outcomes by improving access to services, employment opportunities and economic and social indicators for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Linkages

Linkages with Specific Queensland Government Initiatives

The Community Relations Plan is developed under the framework of the Multicultural Queensland Policy. It works through the Multicultural Queensland Policy and in this way links with whole-of-government and agency-specific strategies and initiatives aimed at improving service delivery, employment opportunity, community participation and quality of life and at eliminating unlawful discrimination. These linkages include the Crime Prevention Strategy; the Community Services Strategy, the Government Service Delivery Project, Access Queensland, the Community Renewal Program, Equal Opportunity in Public Employment; Anti-Discrimination legislation, and the Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility.

Linkages with Reconciliation

The Community Relations Plan supports the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community as fundamental to positive community relations in Queensland. It does not recreate the strategies of reconciliation but affirms that without reconciliation, community relations in Queensland will never be completely addressed. The plan works in support of reconciliation by fostering an environment that values diversity.

Linkages with Broader Principles

The Community Relations Plan is developed in the context of multiculturalism within the structures and principles of Australian Society – the rule of law, Parliamentary Democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language and equality of the sexes. Practices under these broader principles lay the foundation for and direction of positive community relations in Queensland.

Principles

The Community Relations Plan is guided by the core principles of the Multicultural Queensland Policy.

- **Access:** All Queenslanders enjoy equitable access to services and programs.
- **Participation:** All Queenslanders enjoy equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities to participate in, contribute to and benefit from all aspects of life in Queensland.
- **Cohesion:** All Queenslanders share responsibility for the continuing development of Queensland as a cohesive and harmonious society.

Key Strategies and Actions

Access to Services

To improve the community relations environment through better service delivery.

Actions

- identify, build on and promote successful models and projects of culturally inclusive service delivery;
- integrate the Multicultural Queensland Policy into the design and delivery of Government services and programs;
- integrate the Queensland Government Language Services Policy into the design and delivery of Government services and programs;
- integrate diversity and community relations issues into whole-of-government approaches aimed at improving service delivery including the Government Service Delivery Project and Access Queensland;
- integrate to culturally inclusive service delivery into programs funded by Government.

Snapshot

The Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations identified a number of gaps in access to vocational education and training services which traditional approaches were not addressing. The department has initiated community specific training plans based on needs identification undertaken from needs identified by the community. Groups who are participating in this process include Australian South Sea Islanders, volunteers, migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds who have completed the 510 hours of English training but have not yet found placement in employment, refugees, residents of specific locations including Deception Bay, Laidley Shire and others.

Snapshot

The Department of Families, Youth and Community Care implements the Childcare Access and Equity Strategy which aims to improve access for families with special needs, including families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Annually \$100,000 is provided for projects targeting the needs of these families. Successful access and equity projects are promoted as models of best practice to the childcare sector and to the wider community, thereby encouraging the development of further access and equity projects and the wide adoption of effective ideas.

Community Participation

To support broader community participation in planning and promoting community relations initiatives.

Actions

- implement the Local Area Multicultural Partnership program at the local level;
- promote the use of the Register of Multicultural Advisers to suitable community participants and to government agencies responsible for making appointments to boards, committees and similar bodies;
- promote participation by people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the planning and consultation undertaken by Government (including consultations undertaken for whole-of-government policy development and for agency-specific planning).

Snapshot

A forum on community relations was held in Hervey Bay in late 1998. Participants at the forum were asked to contribute ideas on how to work on improving community relations locally. The forum decided to nominate a planning group to continue to work across the community and with government to develop local initiatives to promote community relations.

Cultural Celebration

To support opportunities for diverse groups in the community to interact with each other in positive ways through celebrations of cultural expression.

Actions

- support the development of high quality festivals, activities and projects (including the possibility of a major multicultural festival for Queensland) that foster communication and cooperation between groups;
- support the development of outreach initiatives to regional Queensland aimed at developing multicultural festivals, activities and projects;
- support the ongoing integration of multicultural activities into existing festivals;
- support the development of cultural expression by diverse artists in Queensland;
- promote awareness of multicultural events in Queensland.

Snapshot

The Brisbane Ethnic Music and Arts Centre (BEMAC) runs a program of concerts, performances and workshops by artists from a diversity of backgrounds. The World Music Cafes organised by BEMAC are a popular part of Brisbane's social and cultural scene. The provision of performance and development opportunities benefit many, not in the least, the artists themselves. People from all cultural backgrounds come together to enjoy and share the work of these artists and to celebrate diversity in an environment of relaxation, fun and entertainment.

Education

To provide an educational environment from preschool to the tertiary level that supports the development of positive community relations.

Actions

- integrate cross-cultural perspectives and include the experiences and accounts of a full range of groups into all curricula from preschool through to tertiary levels;
- support improved cross-cultural skills development for teachers through professional development and the incorporation of cross-cultural competency into teaching degrees and diplomas;
- support the development of school-based initiatives which aim to improve community relations.

Snapshot

In 1998, more than 400 students from 21 schools in the Townsville region participated in a peer development session to raise awareness of settlement issues for young people from non-English speaking background (NESB). The project was initiated by the Townsville-Thuringowa Migrant Resource Centre and supported by the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care. The project also aimed to raise awareness of cultural diversity and to develop an information and referral resource to assist NESB students with settlement issues. In the process, it provided the opportunity for students to learn from each other, share ideas and establish meaningful connections with peers from many different backgrounds based on common understandings.

Employment and Training

To improve the community relations environment through maximising opportunities for employment and training.

Actions

- integrate diversity issues into strategies being developed by the Jobs Policy Council to reduce the unemployment in Queensland;
- develop and support initiatives that maximise the advantage of diversity in economic development;
- support research into the impact of business cycle fluctuations on diverse communities;
- integrate strategies that facilitate access to appropriate training opportunities for diverse groups in the community.

Snapshot

International Business Diversity Summits were held in Brisbane and Cairns during 1999. The Summits brought together people in agribusiness, environmental management, education, tourism and building and construction to explore strategies for maximising the diversity advantage in their industries. This included making the connection between the diversity of language and cultural skills of the Queensland population and the cultures and languages of potential export markets. It also looked at how to market across cultural differences, negotiation skills and domestic product testing opportunities for overseas markets. Working groups and regional meetings are being established to further progress the development of these ideas.

Information

To foster and support informed discussion on community relation's issues.

Actions

- develop a series of community relations information products including fact sheets, a community relations resource kit and best practice case studies;
- develop information and an education program on civic rights and responsibilities;
- support suitable community relations education and information projects developed by community groups;
- support community accessible cross-cultural training across the state;
- support culturally sensitive research into community relations issues;
- develop a dissemination strategy for community relations information.

Snapshot

The Ipswich Community Relations Reference Group developed a plan of action to promote positive community relations in the city. One of the activities initiated under the plan was a study program on the development of Ipswich which acknowledged the contribution of people from the many different groups who have immigrated to the region.

Media

To work with the media to improve community relations.

Actions

- support research into issues surrounding the relationship between the media and community relations;
- assist community organisations to develop resources on working productively with the media;
- liaise with Schools of Journalism within tertiary institutions to address community relations issues in curricula;
- promote the positive portrayal of the diversity of Queensland's population in publications and promotions;
- establish a community relations media award.

Snapshot

Experiments in Public Journalism have been initiated by Queensland media. Public journalism is an approach to reporting news issues by exploring stories from a variety of angles and from the perspectives of many different participants in the topic. Frequently, public journalism uses well-chaired public forums to facilitate more informed debate about the topic under discussion. It can also lead to the identification of community projects which work to address any contentious issues which emerge.

Partners in Leadership

To develop partnerships with institutions, organisations and groups in the community to support strong leadership in community relations.

Actions

- implement the Local Area Multicultural Partnership program with Local Government to provide a framework for local government action in community relations (consisting of agreements, funding for community relations workers, guidelines for implementation, and resource and information manuals);
- develop a partnership program with business, religious and community leaders (consisting of agreements, resource manuals and access to funding for suitable community relations projects).
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Snapshot

The Local Area Multicultural Partnership program is a partnership strategy between the State and Local Governments to develop community relations plans at the local level. In the first round of partnerships, the State Government has provided resources to the Local Government Association of Queensland to employ a Community Relations Coordinator and to six councils to employ Community Relations Officers. Up to another eight councils will be funded in 1999–2000.

Specifically Targeted Anti-Racism Strategies

To limit the impact of expressions of racism in the community.

Actions

- promote awareness of existing legislation;
- develop specific information and awareness products relating to racism as part of the community relations information strategy;
- promote awareness of support mechanisms for victims of racism.

Snapshot

The Department of Education runs a professional development program for school teachers which assists teachers to develop an understanding of racism and its impact on teachers and children. The program called Under the Skin provides teachers with information and resources on how to deal with racism in schools.

Snapshot

A Racism in Schools project was funded by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland during 1999. A team worked with 10 primary and secondary schools across Queensland to identify successful “good practice” strategies for dealing with racism and managing diversity. The schools are drawn from the state, independent and Catholic sectors in rural, regional and metropolitan Queensland. The project will document case studies involving schools working in partnership with their communities. These can then be adopted by other schools who want to take up the challenge of working positively within their communities.

Symbolic Representation

To include images and statements of positive community relations in symbolic representations of Australian and Queensland life.

Actions

- integrate positive community relations messages, images and events into celebrations of community, state and nation (Australia Day, Queensland Day, Anzac Day, Centenary of Federation Celebrations, International Women's Day Human Rights Day, NAIDOC Week, National Youth Week);
- support National Harmony Day with a Queensland program of events to celebrate the success of many people from different backgrounds living together in harmony in Australia;
- integrate positive community relation's messages, images and events into celebrations of citizenship including citizenship ceremonies.

Snapshot

The inaugural National Harmony Day was launched in Brisbane on 21 March 1999 with a world music concert held at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. The day coincides with the United Nations Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Aboriginal, Irish, Korean, Scottish and Chinese musicians and artists performed at the concert which culminated with a grand finale of world music fusion. The concert celebrated the creative energy that draws not only from different traditions but also from the point where those traditions meet to make new meanings and new forms of artistic expression.

Implementation

The plan will be implemented over a three-year period in the following way:

- The Interdepartmental Committee on Multicultural Affairs will oversee the implementation of the plan.
- Multicultural Affairs Queensland will:
 - develop an implementation framework for the Plan;
 - work in partnership with Queensland Government agencies, local governments and community and business organisations to develop and implement appropriate responses under the Plan;
 - undertake the development of key resource materials, information and guidelines documents identified in the Plan;
 - widely promote the Plan and initiatives throughout Queensland;
 - ensure that the Plan is evaluated after a three-year period.
- Queensland Government agencies will:
 - implement the Multicultural Queensland Policy and the Queensland Government Language Services Policy as practical contributions not only to service delivery but also to sustaining an environment of positive community relations;
 - support participation by their representatives in community relations planning both centrally and at the local level through programs such as the Local Area Multicultural Partnership program;
 - adopt and adapt other elements of the plan as relevant and appropriate to their programs and services.
- Community groups will be encouraged to:
 - use the plan as a framework for developing their own approaches to improving community relations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Multicultural Affairs Queensland will collate baseline data in the first year to assist in evaluation of the Plan.

It will monitor progress and collate data on the implementation of the Plan as part of overall monitoring of the Multicultural Queensland Policy. MAQ will include updates and identification of emerging issues in its annual report to the Premier.

MAQ will fund an independent evaluation of the Plan after three years.

Glossary

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a framework for the continuing development of one cohesive, harmonious society from diversity. It encourages everyone to express, share and value one another's cultural heritage and aims at ensuring equality of opportunity to benefit from and contribute to all aspects of life without prejudice or discrimination.

Multiculturalism is based on the premise that everyone should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia and to its interests and future. It exists within the structures and principles of Australian society – the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language and equality of the sexes. In this framework, it promotes universal ideals of human rights based on mutual respect, co-operation and a fair go for all.

Community Relations

Community Relations is about working together to respect and value our individual and group differences. It has five core dimensions:

- encouraging respect for and communication between people of different ethnic, national, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
- promoting inclusiveness, cohesion and commitment to Australia in the way we shape our future;
- ensuring that people from all backgrounds have full access to programs and services provided by government and non-government service providers;
- recognising and overcoming barriers faced by some groups to full participation in the social, cultural and economic life of the community;
- reducing discrimination and prejudice.

Community Relations Planning

Community Relations Planning means planning to achieve positive outcomes in the five dimensions of community relations.

Relations between all the diverse groups in the community and between those groups and Government are influenced by a complex combination of historical, environmental, economic, social and institutional factors. These factors create the conditions for community relations to be positive or negative, improving or deteriorating, good or bad. Community Relations Planning means working out how to influence those conditions so that positive outcomes will be achieved.

Community Relations Planning takes a positive approach to dealing with negative influences on the community relations environment, such as racism and prejudice. It takes this approach in order to move forward in a way that can be inclusive of all Queenslanders. It does not ignore injustices experienced by vulnerable communities nor tensions between communities. Community Relations Planning seeks to foster an environment in which racism and prejudice become unsustainable by providing opportunities for people from all backgrounds to work together towards common goals.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is about working together to build relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community. In 1991, the Federal Parliament established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to promote a formal process of reconciliation. The Council's vision is :

- “A united Australia, which respects this land of ours, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all”.

The Council is currently conducting widespread consultations across Australia on a draft Declaration for Reconciliation which is designed to be a unifying, uplifting and forward looking statement of the kind of Australia we want to have in the future. At the same time it is to be a truthful and sincere acknowledgment of the past and present to assist the nation move forward together.

Racism

Racism is the ideology that asserts the superiority of one racially defined group of people over another.

Both direct and indirect racism impact on the community relations environment. Some examples are:

- some isolated groups continue to actively subscribe to racist ideology and promote racial hatred in the community. These groups are neither numerous nor powerful but their message, normally rejected by most people, can sometimes find greater levels of support in times of economic uncertainty and change.
- considerable research has suggested that some aspects of the ways government systems and processes work continue to carry forward, by inertia rather than malice, some of the assumptions of racism. Frequently, these assumptions are invisible to the people who maintain the systems of government, because they are not consciously held beliefs or deliberately made decisions but are entrenched in the practices and processes of decision making and program implementation. This is referred to as institutional racism.
- tensions between different ethnic groups in the community can sometimes take the form of racial conflict. In recent Australian history such incidents have been extremely rare and have never been experienced at anywhere near the level of intensity or seriousness that mar community relations in some other parts of the world. Australia's success in averting racial conflict between groups has come from its solid foundation of parliamentary democracy, rule of law, respect for equality of rights, responsibilities and opportunities and its unique model of multiculturalism which has focused on promoting a "fair go for all". In this way, the root causes of conflict are dealt with before they degenerate into racially demarcated disputes. This success needs to be continued and built on into the future.
- some individuals who subscribe to racist ideology have sometimes taken their private beliefs as justification to perpetrate physical and verbal attacks on people from different cultural backgrounds. Such racist attacks on individuals may not be common or widespread but nor are they unknown. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the levels of such incidents have increased in recent times.
- the uncritical adoption of stereotypes to guide responses to people from different cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic backgrounds is a counterproductive element in intergroup communication and understanding. When such responses are made by people in positions of power there is a potential for limitations upon the rights and opportunities of some groups of people in the community.

