



MELI

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
and Belonging Strategy**

2026–2029

Updated March 2026



Contents

Acknowledgement

At Meli, we acknowledge that we work and connect on the traditional and unceded lands of Aboriginal peoples and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We are committed to the reconciliation journey through our actions and openness to learn.

We are committed to child safety

Meli is dedicated to creating a safe space for children and young people and ensuring our workforce and systems actively safeguard against any form of abuse or neglect of children and young people. We understand our legal and moral responsibilities to take any concerns about child safety seriously, reporting any allegations or wellbeing concerns to the appropriate authorities, and supporting the children and young people impacted as a result of those concerns.

We are committed to supporting the Cultural Safety of all children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children from the LGBTQIA+ community, and children with disabilities. We intentionally guard against discriminatory practices and embrace diversity in all its forms.

We are committed to supporting children, young people, and their families in having a say in decisions that impact them.

Our goal is to be a Child Safe and child-friendly organisation that recognises, respects, and promotes the rights of children and young people.


We celebrate difference

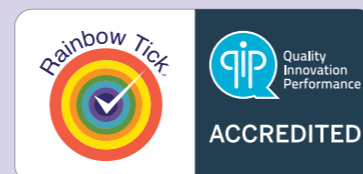
Meli is committed to creating an environment where everyone feels safe and that they belong. We welcome people of all races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, religions, abilities and nationalities and value diversity of experience as a vital part of supporting people and strengthening communities.

We will listen, learn and evolve as an accessible, inclusive and safe organisation for all, including First Nations peoples, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, people with a disability and those with culturally diverse backgrounds.

Meli respects and values the diverse knowledge, experiences and perspectives of people who access our services. We commit to actively supporting lived experience inclusion and leadership. We strive to ensure that decision-making at all levels of our organisation is shaped by the rich and specialist expertise of lived experience.



 Interpreter and translator services are available to all our clients upon request.



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Message from our CEO

At Meli, we believe that a diverse and inclusive workplace benefits everyone.

It leads to better decision-making, strengthens our connections with the communities we serve, and creates a more engaged and supported workforce.

Our **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Strategy** is designed to help Meli realise these benefits by embedding inclusive practices across our organisation.

We should be proud of the progress we have made. Achieving Rainbow Tick accreditation is a significant milestone that reflects our commitment to inclusion. But we know there is more to do. This strategy gives us an exciting opportunity to build on that momentum and create lasting change.

Lived experience is at the heart of this work. We are committed to continuing to listen and learn, ensuring those voices shape our systems, policies, and culture.

This strategy is a practical tool that sets out clear goals and actions, helping us track progress, identify gaps, and make informed decisions. It also reinforces our commitment to transparency and accountability.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this work. Your input has helped shape a strategy that is grounded, inclusive, and focused on continuous improvement.

Together, we can create a workplace where everyone feels valued and supported. I look forward to working alongside you as we bring this strategy to life.



Robyn Hayles
CEO



“

There is so much great work happening across the DEI space at Meli. The commitment is seen, not just spoken about.

2025 DEIB Survey comment

Strategic Alignment

Meli's vision is for a fair, safe and inclusive community where everyone can thrive.

This vision is brought to life through Meli's 2024–2027 Strategic Plan, which sets three strategic goals: to enhance the experience and outcomes for people who engage with us; to be a dynamic, inclusive and learning organisation; and to be an agent for positive system change.

The DEIB Strategy is directly aligned to these goals and acts as a key enabler of their delivery. By embedding diversity,

equity, inclusion and belonging into how we work, lead and make decisions, this strategy strengthens our ability to deliver inclusive services, create a workplace where people feel valued and supported, and influence broader systems in ways that promote fairness and equity.

In doing so, the DEIB Strategy ensures that inclusion is not a standalone initiative, but an integral part of how Meli achieves its strategic priorities and fulfils its purpose.



Governance

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) at Meli is supported by a clear governance framework that ensures accountability, amplifies lived experience voices and embeds inclusion at every level of the organisation. Building a safe and inclusive culture is a shared responsibility across the organisation, supported by strong, inclusive leadership and a whole-of-organisation approach.

This framework enables collaboration between employees, leaders and the Board, creating strong line-of-sight from lived experience to strategic decision-making. At the highest level, DEIB governance flows through the DEIB Committee to the Board of Directors, ensuring inclusion remains a core consideration in shaping Meli's strategy, culture and workforce practices.

DEIB Committee

Reporting to the People and Capability Committee Sub-Committee, the DEIB Committee is made up of members from the Executive Team, operational and service leaders, and Inclusion Working Group leaders, and provides strategic leadership and oversight of DEIB across Meli. It sets priorities, monitors progress against the DEIB Strategy, and ensures a lived experience-centred, intersectional approach aligned with organisational goals.

The DEIB Committee reports to the Board-led People and Capability Committee, strengthening accountability at the highest level of governance.

Inclusion Working Groups

Meli's five employee-led Inclusion Working Groups form the foundation of the DEIB governance model, focusing on Reconciliation, Gender Equity, LGBTQIA+, Cultural Diversity and Disability Inclusion. Centring lived experience and engaging allies, the groups ensure actions are grounded in and responsive to Meli's people experience.

Executive Sponsors

Our Executive Sponsors provide senior leadership, advocacy and guidance, remove barriers, champion inclusion at the executive level, and strengthen connections between working groups, the DEIB Committee and broader organisational priorities.

Working Group Leadership

Each Inclusion Working Group is led by a Chair with lived experience and supported by a Deputy Chair. This shared leadership model prioritises lived experience while guiding priorities, engaging members, and representing the working groups within the DEIB governance structure.



Our Journey to Now

2023

- Meli was born through the merger of BCYF and Bethany, bringing together two respected community service organisations.
- Visibly embraced inclusion by introducing rainbow and First Nations lanyards, pronoun pins, inclusive email signatures, and pride and First Nations flags across all offices.
- Established inclusive foundations with the launch of four employee-led Inclusion Working Groups and the DEIB Committee.
- Listened and learned through our inaugural Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Survey, with results shared organisation-wide.
- Stood for equity by publicly supporting the Voice to Parliament referendum.
- Engaged with community through active participation in NAIDOC Ball, Pako Festa, Pride festivals, and other inclusion-focused events.
- Celebrated diversity by acknowledging key dates from the Inclusion Calendar throughout the year.

2024

- Empowered choice and voice by supporting employees in how they recognise 26 January.
- Strengthened leadership by appointing Executive Sponsors to all Inclusion Working Groups.
- Fostered collaboration through our first Inclusion Summit, promoting intersectional approaches to inclusion.
- Advanced reconciliation with the creation of the Business Partner Reconciliation role and a week-long Reconciliation Week celebration, culminating in Meli's Reconciliation Artwork.
- Progressed LGBTQIA+ inclusion via a mid-cycle Rainbow Tick review and the launch of Gender Affirmation Guidelines and support tools.

2025

- Improved accessibility and wellbeing by distributing free period products and creating sensory-friendly, breastfeeding, and prayer-friendly spaces across offices.
- Strengthened accountability with the release of our second Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Report and a revised Reasonable Adjustments procedure.
- Expanded representation through the formation of the Gender Equity Working Group.
- Celebrated belonging by attending community events including NAIDOC Ball, Pako Festa, and Pride festivals.



Our Workforce Profile

Meli is proud to welcome and celebrate people of all identities and is committed to creating safe and inclusive spaces for everyone.

Our workforce reflects a broad range of lived experiences and identities, shaped by factors such as gender, culture, age, ability, sexuality, caring responsibilities, faith and socio-economic background. Understanding our workforce profile helps us to better identify strengths, gaps and systemic barriers.

These insights enable informed, targeted action to build a workplace where everyone has equitable access to opportunity and feels safe, respected and able to thrive.



Sources:
[Same-sex couples living together in Australia | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)
[2021 Victoria, Census All persons QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)
[Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)



“The messages of diversity, equity, and inclusion are very visible. Meli is great at showcasing different voices and experiences.”

2024 DEIB Survey comment



Employee Voices

We believe the best decisions start with listening. Through our Continuous Listening Strategy, we actively seek out and value the diverse voices of our people.

Employee input informs our DEIB work through a range of formal and informal channels. This includes insights gathered through the 2023 and 2024 DEIB Surveys, the lived experience leadership of our employee-led Inclusion Working Groups, and informal feedback shared during the annual DEIB roadshow and inclusion events held across the year.

These channels provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into experiences of inclusion, belonging, safety, accessibility, and flexibility. Together, they give us a rich and ongoing understanding of what matters to our people and help ensure our DEIB work remains grounded in real employee experience.



Our DEIB Strategic Goals

Our DEIB Strategic Goals are shaped by the insights and experiences shared by our people through our DEIB Surveys, Inclusion Working Groups and broader engagement activities. These insights highlighted what matters most to our workforce and where we need to focus to strengthen inclusion at Meli. Based on this, we have defined four DEIB Strategic Goals that guide our priorities and actions.

Goal 1



Inclusive Leadership

All people across all levels of Meli have the capability and are empowered with the essential skills and tools necessary to champion and lead an inclusive culture.

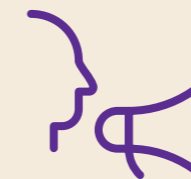
Goal 2



Accessibility for Everyone

We are working to identify, review, reduce or remove the physical, systemic and digital barriers that impact a person's ability to participate at Meli.

Goal 3



Amplifying Lived Experience Voices

We are creating opportunities to connect with and centre the voices of people with lived experiences, while ensuring these voices are part of codesign, especially when it comes to matters that will impact them.

Goal 4



Safe and Welcoming Spaces

We are an organisation free from discrimination, bullying, or harassment. We are focused on our inclusive practice capability, allyship, workforce mutuality, as well as signs of inclusion.



Goal One: Inclusive Leadership

Meli is cultivating a culture where our people leaders lead by example in inclusive practices, empowering all employees with the skills and tools needed to champion inclusion throughout our organisation.

We will focus on:

Building capability for people leaders and DEI champions

We will build the capability of people leaders and DEI champions to enhance skills and knowledge to cultivate a culture of inclusion and belonging to ensure all employees feel valued, respected, and supported.

Diverse representation in leadership and decision making

We will develop inclusive strategies to ensure individuals from historically marginalised and underrepresented groups have equitable opportunities to advance into leadership roles and have a seat at the table during decision-making.

Continuous improvement through accountability

We will establish clear metrics and success indicators for our leaders and DEI champions to track progress, support accountability for inclusive practices and decisions, and acknowledge commitment to DEI initiatives.

How we will measure our progress over the next 1-3 years:

- Achieve year-on-year improvement in agreement to the DEIB Survey statement: “I am confident that my manager demonstrates a commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging” across all employees and among underrepresented employee groups.
- Achieve year-on-year improvement in agreement from underrepresented employee groups on the DEIB Survey statement: “I am confident that the Board and Executive demonstrate a commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging.”

Goal One: Inclusive Leadership

Commitment

Action

1.1. Build the capability of people leaders and DEIB champions to model inclusive behaviours.

- Conduct a baseline survey for people leaders to assess current inclusive leadership practices.
- Ensure that inclusive leadership learning and development needs are incorporated into Meli’s Leadership Strategy and Program development.
- Embed inclusive leadership responsibilities into Meli’s Performance and Review program.

1.2. Increase the representation of diverse voices in leadership and decision making.

- Review leadership roles, recruitment and promotion processes to reflect inclusive leadership expectations as part of Meli’s Leadership Strategy and Program.
- Ensure leaders work to incorporate the use of client and employee voice resources into their decision-making process, where appropriate.

1.3. Strengthen leadership performance in DEIB through continuous learning and accountability.

- Embed inclusive practice reflection into leadership meeting agendas.
- Launch the “Meli Stars Inclusive Leadership Award” to recognise outstanding inclusive leadership.





Goal Two: Accessibility for Everyone

Meli is removing, reducing, or redesigning physical, digital, and systemic barriers to create an environment where our workplace and services are accessible to everyone.

We will focus on:

Inclusive design and environment

We will ensure that everyone has equal access to resources, facilities, and opportunities by identifying and addressing barriers to accessibility.

Continuous improvement

We will implement ongoing initiatives aimed at understanding barriers and refining accessibility measures through auditing and feedback on physical and digital spaces, as well as on policies and procedures, to ensure contemporary best practice.

Employee capability building

We will invest in employee capability building that supports a strong understanding of the importance of accessibility and identifying barriers to participation for people from historically marginalised and underrepresented groups.

How we will measure our progress over the next 1-3 years:

- Achieve year-on-year improvement in employee agreement with the DEIB Survey statement: “I feel comfortable requesting reasonable adjustments when needed, and the process is straightforward.”
- Year-on-year reduction in employee agreement with the DEIB Survey statement: “I have difficulty with physical/digital accessibility in my workplace which could be prevented by reasonable adjustment.”

Goal Two: Accessibility For everyone

Commitment

Action

2.1. Embed inclusive design principles across all our physical, digital and service environments.

- Undertake accessibility audits of physical and digital spaces.
- Develop a plan to address the findings and recommendations by embedding actions into existing strategies and/or operational plans across relevant areas of Meli.

2.2. Foster a culture of continuous improvement in accessibility.

- Track and report on accessibility improvements annually to measure impact.
- Communicate changes and improvements made in response to feedback through Facilities team updates to employees.

2.3. Build inclusive practice skills across the workforce.

- Build accessibility and inclusive practice principles into Meli’s Common Practice Approach.
- Ensure that inclusion training is embedded into Meli’s mandatory training schedule and monitor compliance.





Goal Three: Amplifying Lived and Living Experience Voices

Meli is actively seeking and amplifying the voices, experiences, and perspectives of individuals with lived and living experience. These insights will inform our decision-making, systems, and practices, helping us identify and address barriers more effectively.

We will focus on:

Diverse representation in decision making

We will build representation opportunities into decision-making processes to ensure that individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences are consulted.

Employee-led working groups

We will encourage a broad range of employees to participate in employee-led working groups, consistent with the operation of the Quality Governance Framework.

Inclusive codesign and collaboration

We will ensure diverse perspectives and experiences are built into the design and development of policies, programs, and initiatives by engaging people from historically marginalised and underrepresented groups, as well as building partnerships with community groups and external organisations who can share lived experience to create better, more inclusive outcomes.

How we will measure our progress over the next 1-3 years:

- Year-on-year, increased representation of employees from historically marginalised and underrepresented groups across Meli, as measured through our people analytics reporting.

NB: Goal Three relates specifically to amplifying the voices of employees with lived and living experience. It is distinct from the Client Voice and Participation Strategy, which focuses on people accessing our services.

Goal Three: Amplifying Lived & Living Experience Voices

Commitment

Action

3.1. Embed lived and living experience perspectives in decision-making processes.

- Integrate lived and living experience into the Employee Voice and Continuous Listening strategies.
- Conduct targeted consultation sessions to amplify underrepresented voices in employee engagement.

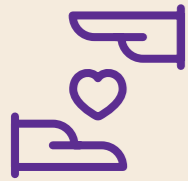
3.2. Strengthen the engagement and influence of employee-led working groups.

- Create structured opportunities for employee-led working groups to contribute to decision-making and strategy.
- Include employee-led working groups representatives in DEIB roadshows, communications, and events.

3.3. Embed inclusive co-design and collaboration through structured advisory and engagement.

- Develop and implement a toolkit for diverse consultation, including guidance on when and how to engage employees with lived and living experience.
- Embed inclusive employee consultation practices into project planning frameworks.





Goal Four: Safe and Welcoming Spaces

Meli is cultivating a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all, with a special focus on supporting individuals from historically marginalised and underrepresented groups.

We will focus on:

Signs of inclusion

We have visible and accessible signs of inclusion – such as inclusive language, symbols, and DEI-related policies – throughout Meli’s physical and digital spaces to clearly communicate our commitment to belonging, consistent with Meli’s brand and voice.

Allyship and advocacy

We will promote a culture of allyship and advocacy by offering resources and opportunities for employees to lead by example within their teams and communities.

Accountability

Consistent with Meli’s policies and procedures, we will work to ensure employees uphold their responsibility in creating safe, inclusive, and welcoming spaces.

How we will measure our progress over the next 1-3 years:

- Achieve year-on-year improvement in employee agreement with the DEIB Survey statement: “I feel like I belong at Meli.”
- Achieve year-on-year improvement in employee agreement with the DEIB Survey statement: “I would feel comfortable reporting discrimination if I experienced it personally or witnessed someone else experiencing it.”
- Achieve year-on-year improvement in employee agreement with the DEIB Survey statement: “Meli provides training and education on topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

Goal Four: Safe and Welcoming Spaces

Commitment

Action

4.1. Strengthen and promote Meli-wide signs and signals of inclusion.

- Apply inclusive design principles to shared spaces design and redesign.
- Promote wearable symbols of inclusion that enable employees to visibly express allyship and identity.
- Integrate DEIB learning into the onboarding process for all new starters, ensuring 100% completion within the first six months of employment.

4.2. Champion allyship and advocacy at all levels of Meli.

- Strengthen the Meli-wide allyship network of Executive sponsors and site-based champions who lead and model inclusive practice.
- Build the capability of the allyship network through training, peer learning, and practical tools.

4.3. Implement systems and supports that uphold inclusive behaviours and address exclusion or harm.

- Embed inclusive behaviours into the ‘Meli Way’ and performance frameworks.
- Review the process of reporting of bullying, discrimination, and harassment to ensure they are accessible, safe, and responsive to incidents of exclusion or harm.
- Promote the process of reporting of bullying, discrimination, and harassment to all employees to ensure that there is clarity.







How to contact us

We provide support in offices located in the Barwon and Wimmera South West regions.

Community Support

 General enquiries: 03 5226 8900

 info@meli.org.au

Meli Kindergartens

 General enquiries: 03 5273 0200

 kindergartens@meli.org.au

 [@meli.community](https://www.facebook.com/meli.community)

 [@meli.community](https://www.instagram.com/meli.community)

 [@meli-community](https://www.linkedin.com/company/meli-community)



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