



## Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs, QLD

### **A Taste of Harmony serves as an entrée for cultural diversity in this workplace!**

Every A Taste of Harmony event is different and Multicultural Affairs, within the Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs, has provided a great example of how it can help strengthen existing workplace initiatives.

Promotion of diversity and inclusion is already at the core of the work undertaken by Multicultural Affairs, so it was a natural fit to get involved in A Taste of Harmony. The team decided to link it with an existing event that would not only benefit their department, but also provide an opportunity to involve other government agencies, corporate and community organisations.

The event sold out a week in advance with more than 200 people securing their spot. It still remains a stand-out event in attendance and enthusiasm for the year.

We spoke with the team at Multicultural Affairs who described their A Taste of Harmony experience as an 'entrée' opportunity to hear from an expert panel of speakers and delve deeper into key diversity and inclusion issues including mentorships, recruitment and culture at an individual level.

One team member said, "sharing food at A Taste of Harmony was a wonderful way to connect with people and have conversations that reinforce why we are so lucky to live in this peaceful, multicultural country."

Here is how it all worked!

### **You had a unique way of incorporating A Taste of Harmony into an existing workplace initiative, can you tell us more?**

The Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs has an initiative called the [Multicultural Queensland Charter Speaker Series](#). The aim is to explore different topics relating to diversity and inclusion and ways we can make Queensland a more inclusive, harmonious and united place. We decided that it was a great fit to incorporate A Taste of Harmony into the Speaker Series and help make it a special event. We invited guests to attend a half an hour informal morning tea prior to the formalities of the Speaker Series kicking off. Given it was a big event, we decided to provide the food instead of asking people to bring in their own dishes.

### **Without staff and guests bringing dishes, how did you incorporate the food element of A Taste of Harmony?**

We sourced our food from incredible local social enterprise catering businesses which support migrants and refugees. This meant not only did we have a delicious spread of food representing different cultures and amazing foods (including African donuts, Vietnamese rice paper rolls and Indian-English Bombay sausage rolls) – but we were also supporting a good cause.

We also wanted to demonstrate the cultural diversity of our guests. We were able to do this visually by displaying a large world map and asking attendees to mark countries associated with their cultural heritage. This allowed all guests to express their own cultural identity as well as observe the range of cultural backgrounds present on the day.

To make it educational and specific to our State, we displayed a migration timeline for Queensland. Several guests commented they learnt a bit more about Queensland's multicultural history. The timeline was a fantastic conversation starter for guests to talk about their family history and cultural diversity.

### **What did the Speaker Series component involve?**

Our Speaker Series included a key note speaker and a panel. We were able to secure an impressive line-up of speakers and panel members, including the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner, the Queensland Police Commissioner and representatives from Suncorp and Queensland Health.

The theme was linked to the [Multicultural Queensland Charter](#), which is the State's vision for an inclusive, harmonious and united community. The panel talked about a range of practical ways they are bringing the Charter principles to life, including through mentorships and recruitment.

The Minister for Multicultural Affairs also spoke to and cited statistics from the last Census. He noted the number of people in the room likely to have been born overseas, have a parent born overseas or speak a second language, which again emphasised the cultural diversity in the room.

### **What benefits did you see (or hear about) from your event guests?**

We saw and heard about a quite a few benefits. Some stand-outs include:

- Some guests were surprised to learn about the incredible cultural diversity of 'Anglo-Saxon' guests, which was a reminder not to assume anything!
- Guests enjoyed the activity that showed on a world map where other guests' cultural backgrounds were from and how they choose to identify their ethnicity - it was interesting to see where the 'clusters' were focused.
- Guests raved about tasting food they might not ordinarily eat (the Eritrean doughnuts were extremely popular!)

All in all, we see A Taste of Harmony as a perfect stepping stone for organisations to set the right vibe to go on and implement more ambitious cultural diversity initiatives. It gets the conversation started, and staff in the right mindset.

### **Are there any particular stories of guests that you can share?**

We had two guests who found themselves looking at the migration timeline at the same time and discovered, much to their surprise, that they both had family migrate to Australia from Italy (specifically Sicily) following World War II. They were able to talk about this shared cultural background.

Another guest spoke about how culturally diverse her family was due to adopted children and family members marrying partners from different backgrounds. Now their family barbeques involve a rich array of foods from many cuisines!

### **Was there anything that surprised you that came up in discussions?**

One guest mentioned that often it is assumed that Anglo-Saxon folk have quite homogenous and 'stock standard European' backgrounds, but after talking with some other guests, she was surprised at the diversity of their family heritage.

### **With such a large event how did you communicate your activity?**

We thought strategically about how we could get as many people participating in our A Taste of Harmony event as possible. That's why we decided to add the morning tea onto an existing, well attended event that was already in place. In doing this, we were able to include the morning tea in the invitation for the Speaker Series.

### How did you make sure that staff put pens down and took part in activity?

To make it easy for people to attend we:

- Sent invitations out a month in advance to give plenty of notice
- Chose a venue that was easy for the majority of guests to access
- Catered the morning tea, so people wouldn't feel burdened to cook, or feel like they couldn't come along if they didn't bring something
- Made the morning tea part of an existing event that is already well attended
- Highlighted in the invite that this event is in the spirit of embedding the principles of the Multicultural Queensland Charter.

### Why would you encourage other organisations to get involved?

We encourage other organisations to get involved with A Taste of Harmony as it allows people (staff or otherwise) to learn about cultures different to their own and the unique journeys some of us have taken to Australia, as well as taste food they might not usually eat.

From an organisational perspective, it's a great way to build understanding and appreciation for the diversity of backgrounds of those around us. This lays the foundation for the success of other diversity and inclusion initiatives organisations might go on to introduce. For those already well progressed in their diversity and inclusion journey, A Taste of Harmony acts to simply reinforce their efforts.

For Queensland Government departments who, under the *Multicultural Recognition Act 2016* are required to consider the Multicultural Queensland Charter in their work, this is a simple and practical way to bring the principles of the Charter to life.

