



Accessibility & Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2028

Full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society

Acknowledgement

AMES Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands that our many offices are built upon and on which we meet and work today.

We extend our respects to the Elders who have walked and cared for this land for tens of thousands of years, and the descendants who maintain the spiritual connection to country, land, waters, sky, and cultures.

We are committed to our reconciliation journey, because at its heart, reconciliation is about bringing healing and flourishing relationships between First Nations and non-First Nations Peoples, for the benefit of all.



This artwork called “The Journey” was a wonderful creation by malu.bajigal (Brenda Mau) a proud Torres Strait Islander, Mandubarra, Kalkadoon, Wuthagi, Ngadjonjii woman. “The Journey” represents the ongoing journey of AMES clients from the time that they arrive in Australia to when they settle and integrate into the community. This artwork is AMES official artwork which is also incorporated in AMES Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan.



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Message from the Executive



Cath Scarth

Chief Executive Officer

As the CEO of AMES Australia, I am pleased to announce the completion of the AMES Australia Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2028, marking a significant milestone in our commitment to equity and empowerment. This initiative underscores our dedication to ensuring that people living with a disability have equal access to opportunities within our organisation and within the community.

The activities in the Plan are fundamental to our mission to improve outcomes by building and maintaining a workplace that actively promotes inclusivity in all aspects of our operations. With the focus on our people, our clients, and the communities within which we operate, we prioritise processes, systems and facilities that support access to all. Achieving these goals requires a collective effort - each one of us has a role to play in making our organisation more inclusive and accessible. By working together we can create a workplace where all can thrive and contribute their best.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of AMES Australia's Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group in overseeing our Accessibility and Inclusion Plan. We now move forward with determination and pride, knowing that our efforts will lead to a more equitable and inclusive organisation



Catharine O'Grady

General Manager People & Development

As the executive sponsor of AMES Australia's Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan, I am honoured to announce its official launch. This initiative reflects our unwavering commitment to creating an environment where all people can thrive and contribute fully. By embedding accessibility and inclusivity into our organisational DNA, we are not only fulfilling a moral imperative but also aligning with our strategic priorities.

At AMES, we recognise that inclusivity is essential for achieving our broader goals of enhancing client outcomes and promoting the social and economic well-being of our community. Our commitment is structured around 5 pivotal pillars: Accessibility, Employment practices, Community engagement and partners, Workplace culture and Governance. These pillars will guide our actions and shape our journey toward a more inclusive and accessible organisation. These pillars are the foundation of our Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan. They reflect our dedication to making meaningful, lasting changes that demonstrate benefit to our employees, clients and communities.

I encourage each of you to actively participate in this journey and contribute to our shared success. I commend our team for their dedication and innovation in advancing these critical initiatives, and I look forward to the positive impact we will collectively achieve through our ongoing commitment to accessibility and inclusion at AMES.

About AMES Australia

AMES Australia is a Victorian statutory authority established under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*. As a specialist provider of services for refugees, migrants, and multicultural communities, we support individuals from the earliest stages of their settlement journey to achieving independence, recognizing that each journey is unique. Our clear vision promotes full participation in a cohesive and diverse society, guiding our organizational priorities and activities.

AMES demonstrates public value through:

- **Client-Led Integrated Services:** We provide seamless settlement support, addressing gaps left by other services, as confirmed by our clients.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** We work with government, multicultural communities, corporations, and other organizations to foster development and innovation.
- **Research and Knowledge Sharing:** Our participation in networks generates insights into our clients and the settlement ecosystem, informing policies that impact communities and individuals.

Our vision is supported by our Social and Economic Participation Framework, which focuses on health, education, employment, and safety. We strive to reduce disadvantage, increase participation, and empower individuals with a greater voice and responsibility.

We take pride in our diverse workforce and actively recruit employees from varied backgrounds and abilities. Our team embodies the Victorian Public Sector values - responsiveness, integrity, impartiality, accountability, respect, leadership, and human rights - in all interactions.

In 2023-24, we delivered programs and services from 55 locations across Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Northern Territory, and Tasmania, reaching newly arrived migrants, refugees, multicultural learners, job seekers, young people, older migrants needing care, individuals with disabilities, and multicultural community members.



Our commitment to inclusion

AMES is committed to creating an inclusive, diverse, and welcoming workplace for all employees and the clients we serve. AMES recognises that this is best achieved by fostering and valuing the diversity of our workforce and the communities in which we operate.

AMES key diversity and inclusion objective is to create a workplace that enables all employees to contribute at their best, feel connected, included, and able to bring their whole selves to work. This objective is guided by a suite of plans to drive our diversity and inclusion initiatives (refer Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. AMES Australia's diversity and inclusion plans



Legislative and policy context

This Plan sits within the context of legal and policy frameworks at the state and federal levels which include The *Disability Act 2006* (Victoria) (section 38), The *Disability Inclusion Act 2018* (South Australia), The *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (New South Wales), The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*, *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31* and The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. These frameworks guide and inform the actions and strategies outlined in the Plan, ensuring the actions align with broader government priorities and obligations.

AMES also acknowledges those who may not identify as living with a disability, but who may be positively impacted by this Plan – such as people with lived experience of neurodiversity, mental health issues and chronic health conditions; the Deaf Community; primary carers of people with disabilities; and other people whose lives are affected by those living with disabilities.

The Plan outlines AMES commitments, actions, and strategies to improve the lives of people with disability, and we aim to ensure that all our programs, services, and facilities are fully accessible and inclusive for all.

AMES Accessibility and Inclusion (A&I) initiatives

The following provide examples of AMES prior and current accessibility and inclusion initiatives.

Delivering disability services as a NDIS provider	<p>Acknowledging the under-representation of multicultural and refugee participation in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), AMES became a registered NDIS provider in 2021 with the intent to increase access and involvement in the scheme for multicultural communities, particularly through the role of Support Coordination. Support Coordination aligns to many of our programs, and uses a strength-based approach to enable individuals to live independently in the community. Support Coordination has been the primary driver for AMES NDIS program since services commenced, however AMES will continue to expand services to meet the needs of the multicultural communities through a variety of other services under our NDIS registration. AMES currently provides NDIS services in Victoria and South Australia.</p>
Developing cultural inclusive training for aged care and disability care industries	<p>Recognising the diversity within the care industry and the need for inclusive practices, AMES developed and implemented easily accessible, free, online cultural inclusive training for employers in the aged care and disability industries in 2022, also enhancing the practical placement experiences of Vocational Education and Training (VET) students.</p> <p>The training modules were co-designed with industry stakeholders, ensuring industry relevance. Once launched, other industries approached AMES, expressing interest in adapting the modules to their specific needs and characteristics.</p> <p>This unforeseen expansion showcased the broader applicability of the cultural safety training content, reinforcing the importance of fostering inclusivity and cultural competency across various industries.</p> <p>By enhancing the cultural inclusiveness through this training AMES aspires to enable people with disabilities to be more confident and comfortable in the services that they receive and embrace the diverse abilities that can be utilised in the disability industry.</p>
The Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group	<p>Led by General Manager of People and Development, the working group includes representatives from various AMES sites. They aim to enhance accessibility and inclusion for employees, clients, and the community, drawing on their lived experiences and or their allyship to inform actions.</p> <p>The group plays a crucial role in developing and implementing the Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan.</p>

Case Study

Assisting job seekers into sustainable employment



Salman who arrived in Australia in 2012 as a refugee faced significant challenges in finding employment. Relying on government support. They struggled with health issues, language barriers, limited literacy and numeracy skills, and inadequate formal education.

After connecting with the AMES employment team in Craigieburn, Salman was referred to various job opportunities. Despite their strong desire to work, they found it difficult to adapt, even feeling overwhelmed at times. Potential employers suggested there were issues about Salman fitting in, leading to repeated rejections. However, the AMES team remained committed, seeking suitable matches for the new arrival.

Recognising potential, An AMES Employment Mentor and an AMES Employer Engagement Specialist advocated at a local factory. They successfully persuaded the employer to offer another chance of employment to Salman. To support reintegration, the team arranged employment counseling and conducted daily check-ins, helping build Salman's confidence and skills.

With ongoing guidance from AMES, comfortability was found in the new role, opportunities for growth were embraced, and eventually Salman became a valued team member. Today, they are successfully employed, happily married, and eager to advance their career.

This case highlights the transformative power of personalised support and community assistance in overcoming barriers to employment.

Case Study

Collaboration with providers for better outcomes for clients



Aden, AMES Client from Settlement Services and Community Care Programme is a non-English speaking 16 year old teenager, who arrived, in Melbourne with his family, (mother and two older brothers -19 & 20), from Syria.

Aden has been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and as a result is quadriplegic. Aden is unable to stand or walk and also unable to complete activities of daily living. i.e.. showering, toileting, etc.

Upon arrival, AMES Case Manager understanding Aden's circumstances directed him to KareOne* for assessment. KareOne is AMES NDIS provider and has 19 years of experience working in the disability sector, and has extensive knowledge of client needs and requirements, as well as providing cost effective service.

Following the referral, KareOne completed an assessment to identify Aden's needs and requirements, based upon his disability and layout of the home. Upon completion of their assessment, Kare One outlined the recommendations of support and assistive technologies, appropriate to meet Aden's needs. By coordinating with the Department of Immigration for approval of funding the recommended services were delivered, enabling services to be engaged to support Aden and his family, in daily living activities.

Aden now has access to the assistive technologies and personal care he requires to continue a comfortable life with his family.

Development of the Plan

The AMES Accessibility and Inclusion (A&I) Plan builds on the organization's inclusion efforts over the last few years. This Plan will formalize actions to drive long-term change, while guiding work that needs to be completed within the first four years.

AMES will work to:

- continue to build on our workplace culture that promotes inclusion and respect, having a safe and accessible working environment; and
- tailor our policies, programs, and services to integrate accessible and inclusive practices across the organization

The development of AMES Accessibility and Inclusion Plan 2024-2028 (the Plan) has been guided by the relevant legislations which includes but not limited to *Disability Act 2006* (Victoria), *Disability Inclusion Act 2018* (South Australia) and *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* (New South Wales).

The 4 key outcomes in the *Disability Act 2006* (Victoria) that are referred to during the development of the plan are;

- 1.Reducing barriers to persons with a disability accessing goods, services and facilities;
- 2.Reducing barriers to persons with a disability obtaining and maintaining employment;
- 3.Promoting inclusion and participation in the community of persons with disabilities;
- 4.Achieving tangible changes in attitudes and practices which discriminate against persons with a disability.

Development of the Plan was undertaken in consultation with stakeholders across the organization through the Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group (the A&I Working Group), which comprises:

- employees with lived experience of disability, chronic health conditions, neurodiversity and/or mental health conditions;
- employees with personal or professional experience, expertise and commitment to improving equity of access in all aspects of life to ensure they have equal access to AMES services;
- employees with an explicit interest in disability access and inclusion;
- representation from each organizational portfolio as well as consultation with operational leaders responsible for actions within the Plan.

Membership will be representative of the diversity of our organization with reference to ability, age, gender, sexual identification, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander identity, and cultural and linguistical background.

The Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group, originally known as AMES Disability Consultative Committee, was established in 2020 as part of our commitment to being a welcoming, engaging and inclusive organization, and to advise on the needs, views and aspirations of people of all abilities to assist with the reshaping of policy, service provision and planning at AMES.

Implementation of the Plan

Responsibility for implementing the Plan is shared across the organisation with the CEO and General Manager People and Development as executive champions of the Plan.

The People and Development Team will work in partnership with business areas to implement initiatives from the Plan relevant to their respective work function and operation.

The A&I Working Group will:

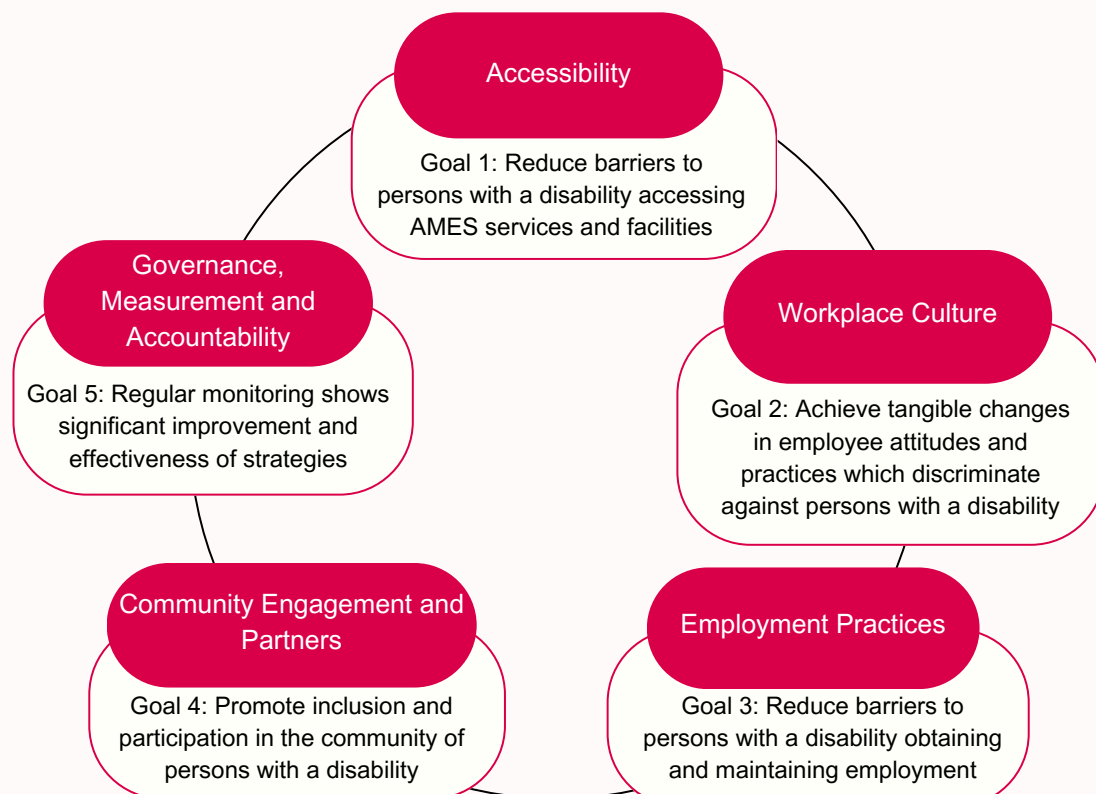
- Provide monitoring and oversight of the Plan;
- Maintain effective consultation processes with employees and be the first point of contact; and
- Where required, provide advice and recommendations to the Executive on:
 - Issues that impact on the life opportunities of people of all abilities;
 - Best practice' in universal access planning; and
 - Implementation of the Plan and actions.

Communication about progress on the Plan will be provided on a bi-annual basis to the organisation via the AMES Intranet. Progress against the Plan will be reported in AMES annual report and to the Executive team via an annual performance report.

AMES Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan 2024–2028 identifies 5 priority pillars:

1. Accessibility
2. Workplace culture
3. Employment practices
4. Community engagement and partners
5. Governance, measurement, and accountability

Goals 1 to 4 align with the key outcomes of the Disability Act 2006. Goal 5 ensures AMES has leadership support and a monitoring process to implement and report progress on the Plan.



The Actions

P1

Pillar 1: Accessibility – Physical and digital environment provides an inclusive employee and client experience

Goal 1: Reduce barriers to persons with a disability accessing AMES services and facilities

Outcome: Improved and enhanced physical accessibility of our built environment; and digital accessibility of our website and digital materials

	What we want to achieve (priority)	Action	How we will measure our success	Responsibility	Timeline
1.1	Review the accessibility of the built environment and develop a plan to prioritise, invest in and improve access in the existing infrastructure	1.1.1. Regularly audit the access of AMES sites and establish a schedule of modifications	Completion of audits on a quarterly basis Documentation of each audit including findings, identified necessary modifications and actions to resolve them within reasonable timeframes.	Manager Facilities Health & Safety Representatives	Quarterly
1.2	Enhance accessibility and inclusivity across AMES premises and digital platforms	1.2.1. Ensure content created for digital channels, including AMES website, considers accessibility and integrates inclusive language, imagery, and formats	All digital information passes accessibility testing tools and adheres to current digital accessibility standards.	People & Development Team Marketing and Communications Team IT Team	Year 3
		1.2.2. Review signage in AMES premises to improve accessibility, ensuring welcoming and affirming statements are displayed at AMES receptions	Completion of initial signage audit to identify areas for improvement Non-compliant signage replaced or updated within 6 months post-audit	People & Development Team People Managers Accessibility & Inclusion Working Group	Year 2

P2

Pillar 2: Workplace Culture – A disability inclusive and equitable workplace, which values fairness and respect

Goal 2: Achieve tangible changes in employee attitudes and practices which discriminate against persons with a disability

Outcome: All employees are committed to contribute to respectful and inclusive work environment

	What we want to achieve (priority)	Action	How we will measure our success	Responsibility	Timeline
2.1	Promote a culture of inclusion by empowering AMES employees through disability awareness and recognition	2.1.1. Investigate employee training needs	Identify training needs through performance reviews and employee feedback and address them with referring them to required training.	People & Development Team People Managers Accessibility & Inclusion Working Group	Year 2
		2.1.2. Develop and deliver disability awareness training for employees	All employees have access to the online training 50% of employees have completed the training	People & Development Team Accessibility & Inclusion Working Group	Year 2
		2.1.3. Share success stories on internal platforms, promote disability awareness events, and champion accessibility initiatives.	Success stories are events and initiatives shared on KIT and Hub Meetings and on external AMES social media channels.	People & Development Team Marketing and Communications Team Accessibility & Inclusion Working Group	Ongoing
		2.1.4. Appoint a Contact Officer for each AMES hub to promote inclusive practices and provide learning opportunities, such as joining the Victorian Public Sector Enablers Network.	All 4 AMES hubs have a Contact Officer Contact Officers have completed necessary training	People & Development Team Accessibility & Inclusion Working Group	Year 2
		2.1.5. Inform client-facing employees about disability services and caregiver support via the AMES Service Directory and organizational communication	Client-facing employees have access to and are actively using the AMES Service Directory	People & Development Team Service Redesign Team People Managers Accessibility & Inclusion Working Group	Year 3

P3

Pillar 3: Employment Practices - Inclusive employment policies and practices to strengthen career opportunities for people with disability

Goal 3: Reduce barriers to persons with a disability obtaining and maintaining employment

Outcome: Prospective, new, and current employees with disabilities are supported to thrive and succeed at AMES

	What we want to achieve (priority)	Action	How we will measure our success	Responsibility	Timeline
3.1	Maintain inclusive recruitment practices by addressing unintended barriers for people with disabilities	3.1.1. Review AMES recruitment processes to identify potential unconscious bias and to embed accessibility and inclusion principles, support mechanisms.	The recruitment process and policy is reviewed and updated as needed. Ensure employees are aware that the process is based on merit and without bias.	People & Development Team People Managers	Year 2
		3.1.2. Ensure internal and external AMES recruitment advertisements include a statement demonstrating our commitment to inclusiveness	All AMES recruitment advertisements include a statement of commitment to inclusiveness	People & Development Team	Year 2
		3.1.3. Review and understand reasonable accessibility practices and tools required for candidates throughout the recruitment process	Number of positive feedback received from the candidates/new joiners on the accessibility during the recruitment process monitored and recorded.	People & Development Team Hiring Managers	Year 3
		3.1.4. Share AMES employment opportunities through disability-focused employment programs, initiatives and partnerships to attract candidates and volunteers with disabilities	Form at least 2 partnerships with disability-focused organisations Increased number of applications from candidates with disabilities year-on-year	People & Development Team People Managers Accessibility & Inclusion Working Group	Year 3

	What we want to achieve (priority)	Action	How we will measure our success	Responsibility	Timeline
3.2	Enhance retention and employment practices by addressing unintended barriers for people with disabilities	3.2.1. Embedding accessibility and inclusion in all relevant AMES policies and procedures.	All AMES policies, procedures and communications including AMES Reasonable Adjustment Policy are reviewed and ensure inclusive language and images are included.	People & Development Team Hiring Managers	Year 3
		3.2.3. Enhance people Managers' disability confidence	People managers have access to a variety of internal and external services to build their confidence in hiring and working with individuals with disability.	People & Development Team People Managers Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group	Year 3



P4

Pillar 4 - Community Engagement and Partners – Inclusive engagement and collaboration with the communities we support

Goal 4: Promote inclusion and participation in the community of persons with a disability

Outcome: Increased participation of persons with disabilities in community events and activities, fostering stronger connections and collaboration with local organizations, leading to a more inclusive community environment.

	What we want to achieve (priority)	Action	How we will measure our success	Responsibility	Timeline
4.1	Ensure community engagement activities are accessible and inclusive	4.1.1. Review organisational practices which influence the community	All policies relating to community engagement are reviewed to remove any barriers and make reasonable adjustments to access the services	People Managers Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group	Year 4
		4.1.2. Inclusive engagement guidelines are adhered to during community engagement activities	AMES community events are accessible	People Managers Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group	Year 4
4.2	Enhance participation and support for individuals with disabilities through AMES services	4.2.1. Collaborate with organisations that specialise in providing support for individuals with disabilities	Partnerships with at least 2 disability-focused organisations formed	People Managers Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group	Year 3
		4.2.2. Promote AMES programs and services to the wider community including disability inclusive forums	A minimum of one disability inclusive forums or events annually participated or hosted	Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group	ongoing
		4.2.3. Offer work experience and volunteer opportunities at AMES to individuals with disabilities	A minimum of one work experience or volunteer positions specifically for individuals with disabilities created and filled	People Managers People & Development Team	Year 3
		4.2.4. Proactively link existing and potential new AMES clients with disabilities to the AMES NDIS team for any relevant information and assistance	Increase in number of clients using AMES NDIS services year-on-year	General Manager Settlement Support and Community Care People Managers	Ongoing

P5

Pillar 5 - Governance, Measurement and Accountability

Disability initiatives championed by senior leaders; and workforce data used to inform progress and accelerate change.

Goal 5: Regular monitoring shows significant improvement and effectiveness of strategies

Outcome: There is clear leadership accountability and responsibility to drive change

	What we want to achieve (priority)	Action	How we will measure our success	Responsibility	Timeline
5.1	Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of AMES Accessibility and Inclusion Plan commitments	5.1.1. Working Group to lead and contribute to commitments	Continue to facilitate the Working Group with regular meetings to review progress and plan future activities Achieve at least 80% of the scheduled milestones for plan implementation each year	Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group People & Development Team	Ongoing
		5.1.2. Maintain employee representation with lived experience in the Working Group	Continue to encourage individuals with lived experience to join the Working Group	People Managers Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group	Ongoing
		5.1.3. Engage all leaders and employees in the implementation of the Plan	Regular communications to all leaders and employees about the plan's progress, with feedback being actively incorporated into the Plan's implementation	Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group People Managers	Ongoing
5.2	Build accountability and transparency through reporting achievements and challenges annually	5.2.1. Register AMES Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan in the Australian Human Rights Commission's Register	Successful registration of the Plan in the Australian Human Rights Commission's Register	Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group People & Development Team	Year 1
		5.2.2. Report action plan progress to all employees, senior leaders and publicly annually	Progress reported in AMES Annual Report and summary report to the Executive	Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group Marketing and Communications Team	Annually



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