



**Workforce Management
Strategy**
2023-2027

Introduction

The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework guides the way councils in NSW develop, document and report on plans for the future of their communities.

Within this framework, the community's vision and strategic direction are articulated and delivered through the Community Strategic Plan. Council translates from the Community Strategic Plan its commitment for what it will deliver during its term in the Delivery Program, achieved through the resources available that are described in the Resourcing Strategy.

As a key element of the Resourcing Strategy, the Workforce Management Strategy seeks to proactively manage how Edward River Council shapes the capacity and capability of its workforce in order to achieve strategic goals.

Developed in consultation with the Executive and Leadership Teams, the Workforce Management Strategy asks and answers four key planning questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to be?
3. How will we get there?
4. How will we know we're on track?

Where are we now?

Following proclamation in 2016, Edward River Council's first Workforce Management Strategy commenced in 2018. The focus of that Strategy was on bringing the two former councils' workforces together and developing a positive and unified culture, which was articulated through four key strategic objectives:

1. **Leadership** – to develop leaders that will inspire, motivate and coach our employees to realise their potential and rise to opportunities and challenges.
2. **Organisational culture** – to create a workforce culture and environment that supports our employees to be their best.
3. **Building workforce capability** – to undertake workforce planning to maintain critical roles, growing our own people and attracting and retaining high performing staff.
4. **Continuous growth and learning** – to drive individual and collective performance through a culture of continuous growth and learning.

During the life of that Strategy, Edward River Council:

- Harmonised the amalgamated councils' salary systems and transferred all employees to the one system.
- Implemented a flexible work program including flexible work arrangements, transition to retirement, rostered days off, variable working hours and working from home opportunities.
- Implemented an Employee Assistance Program, providing staff and their immediate family members access to a free professional counselling service.
- Implemented a TechOne Employee Self Service system to enable more effective management of leave.
- Implemented an online learning management system to assist with onboarding and online training for employees.
- Implemented a leadership capability program in 2019, followed by an emerging leaders' program in 2021, to support our emerging leaders in non-management positions.
- Introduced a monthly BBQ breakfast meeting following each Council meeting to update employees and give them an opportunity to ask the CEO questions or give feedback.
- Supported twelve existing employees, ranging in age from young workers to mature age workers, to undertake traineeships in Civil Construction Supervision, Project Management or Work Health and Safety.

During the past three years, the Edward River community, like communities across the country, has also been affected by ongoing social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as recent natural disasters. This has posed direct and indirect challenges to how Edward River Council balances the public health, economic and social needs of the community, and has also had significant impacts for Edward River Council's workforce. In recent times, the challenge of filling vacancies has grown, with Edward River Council competing with other regional councils, government agencies and local business and industry in a limited labour market.

Within this context, in 2022, Edward River Council commenced a number of activities aimed at stabilising and strengthening the organisation. This included undertaking an employee engagement survey and embarking on the development of an accountability framework, which led to an organisational review. The organisational review identified opportunities to better align strategy, people, systems and processes, and informed the development of an organisational roadmap and new organisational structure. The Roadmap will be implemented over the next four year and seeks to ensure Edward River Council is well placed to deliver on its strategic objectives, through the definition of service levels, the integration of systems and enhancement of leader capability. The implementation of the new organisational structure commenced in mid-2023 and focuses on a service-oriented design aligned to Edward River Council's five strategic goals:

1. Shaping the future
2. An open and connected community
3. Encouraging growth through partnerships
4. Delivering community assets and services
5. Accountable leadership and responsive administration.

Workforce Snapshot

Workforce profile

As at April 2023
Council's workforce
comprised:



127
employees
(117 FTE)

Full-time
83%

Part-time
11%

Temporary
2%

Casual
4%

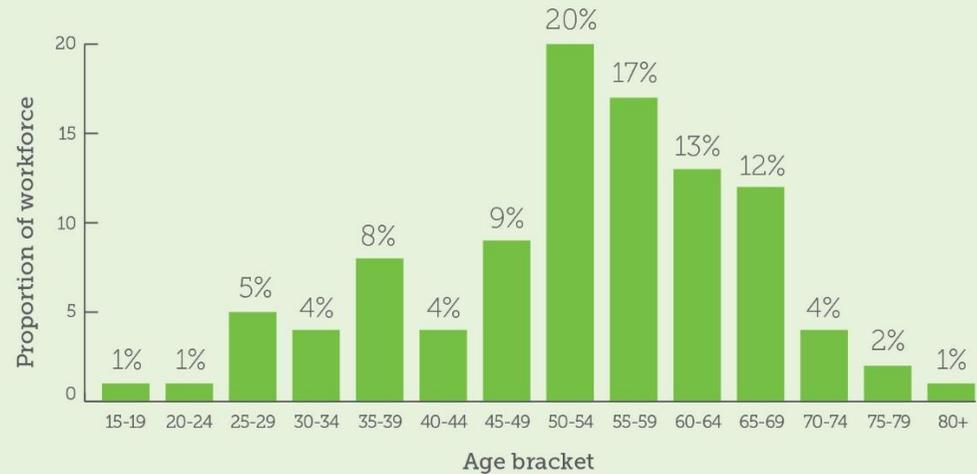
31%
female
employees
(33%
female
leaders)

2%
employees
who identify
as Aboriginal
& Torres Strait
Islander

1%
employees
who live
with a
disability

96%
employees
live in
LGA

Age profile



Additional workforce data



39% employees
have more than 10 weeks
annual leave

78% employees with
excessive leave work in the
Infrastructure Directorate



22%
turnover rate in the
2021/2022 financial year

34%
left within
first year



56%
employees have
accrued LSL

76%
employees with LSL work in
the Infrastructure Directorate



73%
employees completed
mandatory training

25% completed
additional
discretionary training in the
2021/2022 financial year

Workforce challenges and opportunities

It is through the comparison of our workforce snapshot with community¹ and NSW council² benchmarks, and the commitments of the Delivery Program and other regional development that may be competing for workforce, that critical workplace issues for Edward River Council can be identified.

Age

Our workforce is predominately aged 50 years or over, with 31% of the workforce within the notional age of retirement within the next five years. In comparison, the age distribution is more even in the Edward River community. Our ageing workforce poses issues relating to succession planning and the transfer of corporate knowledge that will not be easily recruited into the organisation over the term of this Workforce Management Strategy.

Critically, the issue of an ageing workforce has been identified nationally for a number of years. While it would appear, efforts have been made by urban councils to address this (32% urban council workforces aged 30-44 years), the highest proportion of rural council workforces nationally are aged 55-64 years (29%).

Diversity

When compared to the Edward River community as well as other NSW councils, our workforce does not reflect the diversity of these communities. Edward River Council has fewer employees who identify as female (31% employees compared to an average of 49% in other NSW councils and 50% in the Edward River community), Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (2% of employees compared to an average of 2.1% in other NSW councils and 4.8% in the Edward River community) and people living with disability (1% of employees compared to 1-6% in other NSW councils and 22.4% in the Edward River community). As well as restricting the potential pool of candidates in an already competitive employment market, a lack of diversity limits the potential range of perspectives, opportunities for innovation and decision-making abilities of the workforce.

Employment relationships

At Edward River Council, employees are typically employed on a permanent, full-time basis (83%) and live within the local government area (96%). This reflects a more traditional approach to the employment relationship which can be a barrier to a more inclusive workforce that is responsive to the demands of a competitive employment market. A key workforce mobility legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic is an increased expectation by employees for flexible and innovative working arrangements.

¹ 2022 Local Government Workforce Skills and Capacity Survey

² 2022 ABS Local Government Area data

Recent appointments have demonstrated increasing support for hybrid work models (a combination of on-site and remote work) and changing trends in employment relationships, with 18% of employee appointed in the last two years employed on a part-time or temporary basis and 14% of employees appointed in the last two years living outside the Edward River local government area.

Workforce resilience

Factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and changing needs of the community have posed challenges to the way Edward River Council manages its workforce. This has impacted employees' ability to take planned leave and has resulted in a considerable proportion of employees having excessive leave balances, particularly in the Infrastructure Directorate (39% of all employees with annual leave balances of more than 10 weeks with 78% of employees with excessive leave balances working in the Infrastructure Directorate). Planned leave is critical to ensuring employees are able to refresh, refocus and reenergise, and is important in maintaining workforce resilience and health.

Our workforce resilience is also reflected in our turnover rate (22% in the last financial year). Critically, 34% of the employees who left were within their first year of employment. This indicates these employees may not have been well supported during their onboarding to Council.

Critical skills

Edward River Council has had considerable difficulty attracting and retaining employees in the finance, town planning, project management and operations roles.

This is reflective of a broader sector issue, with 75% of NSW councils experiencing skills gaps across occupations ranging from engineers to arborists, librarians, civil designers, professional, corporate and finance areas. Key drivers for these gaps include:

- Inability to compete with private sector remuneration
- Inability to attract qualified staff to regional or rural locations
- Limited talent pool with appropriate experience to draw from
- Insufficient housing infrastructure to support prospective employees to relocate
- The need to explore non-traditional remuneration structures, including market allowances and performance-based remuneration.

Training needs

At Edward River Council, our training and development program is primarily technical and compliance-based, with 73% of employees completing mandatory training and 25% of employees completing discretionary training.

Across NSW councils, the most common areas of unmet training need experienced are leadership and management training, supervisor training and change management training. Competency in these areas is important to the ongoing performance and success of organisations, particularly within the context of constant change and succession planning for an ageing workforce.

Where do we want to be?

In developing the Community Strategic Plan, Edward River Council undertook significant consultation with community, government, business and industry. This process resulted in the development of shared vision: *Investing in our future*. This vision for our future focuses our efforts on investment, growth and development to support a healthy, socially connected, sustainable and resilient community.

To support the achievement of this shared vision for our community, Edward River Council's service delivery is underpinned by our corporate values. These values form the basis of our organisation culture; they add meaning to our work and provide a basis for consistent planning and decision-making across our organisation.

Edward River Council's values were adopted in 2017 and were developed through a consultative process involving staff from across the organisation. These values are:

L	Leadership We seek to provide strong leadership for our community and customer. We lead with empathy and integrity.
E	Excellence We strive for excellence and continuous improvement: in who we are, in how we work, and in how we deliver results for our community.
A	Accountability We are open, honest and transparent in how we do business, the decisions we make and the actions we take.
D	Delivery We are committed to delivering results for our community and outstanding service to our customers.

Arising from the employee engagement survey completed in 2022, five cultural protocols were also identified. The 2022 organisational review determined that these cultural protocols complement our corporate values and describe the desired future state for our workforce:

1. We give our customers a positive experience.
2. We are extraordinarily transparent and innovative.
3. We are autonomous and accountable.
4. The best part of our job is our amazing work mates.
5. We leave a lasting legacy for the community.

The objectives of this Workforce Management Strategy are to achieve the following workforce outcomes for Edward River Council:

- Improved recognition of the contribution of our workforce
- Improved understanding of the benefits of working at Edward River Council
- Improved engagement of our workforce
- Improved connection between individual work and our strategic direction
- Increased resilience in our workforce
- Improved talent pool within the region and sector, with effective succession
- Improved retention of corporate knowledge.

How will we get there?

Over the life of this Strategy, Council will implement a number of initiatives to support it to achieve its workforce objectives.

As overarching measures of success in the implementation of the Workforce Management Strategy, Edward River Council will be looking for:

- Increased employee engagement results
- Increased representation of people with diverse backgrounds
- Reduced vacancy rates
- Reduced staff turnover rates.

Workforce Objective 1: Edward River Council is an employer of choice in our region and sector

To improve our position in the market, Edward River Council will:

- a. Review our salary system to ensure we are market competitive for incumbent and prospective employees.
- b. Review our attraction and retention program to ensure we are promoting the unique benefits of working at Edward River Council.
- c. Review our induction and onboarding program to support the engagement and retention of new starters.
- d. Complete further employee engagement surveys to ensure we are on the right track.

How will we know we're on track?

- Salary system reviewed by December 2023.
- New salary system implemented by June 2024.
- Attraction and retention program reviewed and recommendations for improvement commenced by June 2024.
- Induction and onboarding program reviewed and recommendations for improvement commenced by June 2024.
- Positive trends in biennial employee engagement results.

Workforce Objective 2: Edward River Council has the capacity and capability to achieve our strategic goals

To build our capacity and capability to deliver against the vision and strategic direction for the future of our community, Edward River Council will:

- a. Recruit priority positions to support the implementation of our Roadmap.
- b. Review our Performance and Development Framework to ensure our employees understand how their work contributes to our strategic direction and are developing the capability to deliver towards this.
- c. Implement a leadership development program to support our leaders to better navigate our workforce challenges and opportunities, building capability and resilience.
- d. Review our EEO Management & Diversity Plan to enable us to better reflect the demographic profile of our community in our recruitment.

How will we know we're on track?

- Priority positions filled by December 2023.
- Performance and development plans consistent with adopted IP&R documents by June 2025.
- Leadership development program commenced by June 2025.
- Positive trends in workforce diversity metrics.

Workforce Objective 3: Edward River Council has systems that help build and retain its corporate knowledge

To improve the development and retention of our corporate knowledge, Edward River Council will:

- a. Identify critical positions and develop succession plans that will ensure we have the right people with the right knowledge and skills at the right time.
- b. Review our traineeship and apprenticeship program to identify opportunities to create more entry-level positions to enable us to 'grow our own' workforce.
- c. Implement a formalised Transition to Retirement program to ensure incumbent employees are able to transfer their corporate knowledge and experience to other employees or systems prior to exiting Council.

How will we know we're on track?

- Critical positions identified by June 2025.
- Succession plans in place by December 2025.
- Trainee and apprenticeship program reviewed and updated program commenced by June 2026.
- Transition to Retirement program implemented by June 2026.

Summary Action Plan

Objectives	Initiatives	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27
Edward River Council is an employer of choice in our region and sector	Review salary system	•			
	Review attraction and retention program	•			
	Review Induction and onboarding program	•			
	Complete employee engagement surveys	•		•	
Edward River Council has the capacity and capability to achieve our strategic goals	Recruit priority positions	•			
	Review Performance and Development Framework		•		
	Implement a leadership development program		•	•	•
	Review our EEO Management & Diversity Plan		•		
Edward River Council has systems that help build and retain its corporate knowledge	Identify critical positions and develop succession plans			•	
	Review our traineeship and apprenticeship program			•	
	Implement a formalised Transition to Retirement program			•	