

# Melton City Council Interfaith Strategy 2018 – 2021

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## **Acknowledgement of the people of the Kulin Nation**

Melton City Council acknowledges that the municipality is sited on land with a human history that began with the Aboriginal communities of the Kulin Nation. Council pays its respects to the Kulin Nation peoples and their Elders and descendants past and present.

## 1. Introduction

The City of Melton is one of Australia's fastest growing municipalities offering enviable and unique urban and rural lifestyles. These attractions have underpinned growth of close to 6000 people per annum over the past decade, equating to the addition of around 34 new families per week.

The City's residential population has grown from 52,029 in 2001 to an estimated 153,120 in 2018. Over the next decade population growth is expected to exceed 7800 people per annum. By 2041, it is expected to reach 381,987 residents and when the City reaches its ultimate population it will have more than 400,000 people. In 2018 its estimated population is 153,120 with an annual growth rate of 4%.<sup>1</sup>

The Melton City Council's Interfaith Strategy supports and contributes to the vision and themes of Council and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021 which set out our commitment towards working with the people from diverse backgrounds with diverse faiths and beliefs.

### Our Vision:

A thriving community where everyone belongs

"Proactivity towards understanding different faith groups to avoid unconscious bias and offending is crucial." Local faith leader

### Themes

- A proud, inclusive and safe community
- A thriving and resilient natural environment
- A well planned and built City
- A strong local economy and lifelong learning City
- A high performing organisation demonstrating leadership and advocacy



The Strategy also directly supports and complements the key themes and actions of the Intercultural Plan 2017- 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics - compiled and presented in profile.id by id, the population experts.

Under the key theme of *Embrace Cultural Diversity* and its associated actions, specifically Initiative 1.3: *Promote religious harmony, dialogue and cooperation between various faith groups*, Council will provide a platform where individuals and community groups from diverse backgrounds can learn more about the values, beliefs and traditions of their neighbours, and also be supported to educate other residents about their own faith and culture. This will promote further understanding and connection in the community. *Action 1.3.1 Support Melton Interfaith Network to develop and extend* fortifies Council's commitment to continuing to work in the interfaith space and support local initiatives in this area.

The municipality has a rich history of migration and cultural diversity, beginning with our Aboriginal heritage, and including migration over many decades from countries such as Malta, Italy and Macedonia. In recent years, our diversity has increased to include more than 30,000 migrants from over 130 nations, bringing with them increasing levels of religious diversity, as well as culture.

“Welcome new faith groups and facilitate their connection with the established faith groups.”  
Representative from an interfaith network

At the same time, increased diversity through migration globally has raised anxieties about the emergence of religiously and culturally diverse communities with little sense of connection between settled groups and newcomers. This has led to several occasions of public religious rejection, tensions, and vilification in the municipality – including rallies by right wing groups in 2015 and 2016. These remind us of the need for increased focus on bridge-building initiatives to promote social cohesion between disconnected groups locally.

To this end, the Melton Interfaith Network (MIN) and Melton City Council have already been operating in the interfaith community building space since 2015.

2016 Census data shows that the City of Melton presents a higher level of religious adherence than Greater Melbourne, with 68.9% of the City of Melton population professing a religious affiliation, as opposed to 60.1% in Greater Melbourne.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2: Religion - Summary**

City of Melton - Total persons (Usual residence)	2016			2011			Change 2011 to 2016
	Number	%	Greater Melbourne %	Number	%	Greater Melbourne %	
<b>Religion totals</b>							
Christian total	76,892	56.8	46.3	70,193	64.2	55.8	+6,699
Non Christian total	15,717	11.6	13.2	10,549	9.7	11.8	+5,168
Non-classifiable religious belief	725	0.5	0.6	742	0.7	0.9	-17
No religion	29,920	22.1	31.3	18,689	17.1	23.5	+11,231
Not stated	12,202	9.0	8.6	9,085	8.3	8.1	+3,117
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>135,443</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>109,258</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>+26,185</b>

This situation presents an opportunity for increasing the capacity and prominence of interfaith relationships and leadership in the community, building on the work already done in this space by Council, Melton Interfaith Network and other community and faith based groups.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Census of Population and Housing](#) 2011 and 2016. Compiled and presented by [.id](#), the population experts. (Usual residence data)

## 2. Purpose of the interfaith strategy

This Interfaith Strategy provides a direction for Council's work in the interfaith area. The Strategy concentrates on the key focus areas to augment Council's capacity to meet the growing needs of our faith and general communities through the lenses of interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism by building relationship, capacity, collaboration and partnership.

The Strategy is developed in response to a number of Key Actions of the Melton Intercultural Plan 2017/2021 to provide a safe and nurturing environment for our community to work on the principles of social cohesion to achieve social harmony where everyone feels a sense of belonging and their contribution is valued in a mutually respectful atmosphere.

Considering relevant Key Action of the Intercultural Plan namely *1.3.3 Develop City of Melton Interfaith Strategy to guide Council's direction in serving increasingly diverse faith communities*, the Strategy aims to work towards an inclusive community that embraces and values faith diversity and promotes interfaith harmony and religious pluralism through the following key focus areas:

- Build sustainable relationship
- Enhance interfaith capacity
- Foster collaborative partnership

These key focus areas emerged following community and key agencies consultation covering a vast range of faith groups and relevant organisations.

## 3. Key concepts

It is important to explore some key concepts related to interfaith to deepen our understanding in this sphere.

### 3.1 What is interfaith?

Interfaith generally refers to relations among different religious traditions.<sup>3</sup> Interfaith also refers to a meeting of people of various faiths in an environment of respect, honesty and freedom which involves actively listening to each other and trying to understand their views and having an opportunity to express your own.

It is about a positive interaction that promotes understanding and builds relationship. It is about having an appreciative knowledge of another faith i.e. finding a dimension of other faith you admire. Interfaith is about the ability to identify shared values<sup>4</sup>.

Interfaith is not about blending or diluting different faiths, but instead it is about finding positive ways for people of different faiths to live together in harmony and respect.

Freedom of religion is great - everyone feels free to celebrate his/her own religious or cultural event. Local faith leader

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<sup>3</sup>About the World Faiths Development Dialogue - Interfaith Journeys An exploration of history, ideas, and future directions February 2017 - <https://s3.amazonaws.com/berkeley-center/170201WFDDInterfaithJourneysExplorationHistoryIdeasFutureDirections.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> What is Interfaith Literacy – Interfaith Youth Core - <https://www.ifyc.org/resources/what-interfaith-literacy-conversation-eboo-patel>

Interfaith Community Sanctuary<sup>5</sup> defines the following aspect of interfaith.

- Interfaith does not seek to homogenise religious differences. Rather, it honors the sacredness and uniqueness of each faith, and then creates ways by which the many paths can meet on common ground or unite in a new and sacred creative form. Differences between various religions and philosophies need not divide and separate but can instead enrich our lives and deepen our capacity to love.
- Interfaith provides a structure whereby individuals of different faiths can dialogue and share their experiences, making a safe place to accept and learn about each other. As fluid, mobile societies and instantaneous communication change the cultural landscape of our world, this structure becomes vital.
- Interfaith also speaks to those who feel alienated from mainstream religions. By providing a spirit of openness and resources for change, interfaith encourages these individuals and groups to discover new ways to worship and to participate in the meaningful ceremonies of life.
- Through interfaith, each person contributes to the whole while fulfilling their own unique role.

### 3.2 What is interfaith dialogue

At its most basic level, interfaith dialogue involves people of different religious faiths coming together to have a conversation. “Conversation” in this sense has an expansive definition, and is not limited to verbal exchange alone. In his seminal work, *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah placed conversation at the very heart of civilisation, defining cultures as “dramatic conversations about things that matter to their participants.” The notion of interfaith dialogue encompasses many different types of conversations, settings, goals, and formats. But it is not an all-encompassing concept: interfaith dialogue is not intended to be a debate. It is aimed at mutual understanding, not competing; at mutual problem solving, not proselytising.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Interfaith Community Sanctuary - <http://interfaithcommunitysanctuary.org/index.php/about-ics/what-is-interfaith/>

<sup>6</sup> United States Institute of Peace - <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr123.pdf>

Informal networks, at the local or community level, can play a valuable role in reconciling different viewpoints, particularly when they involve people who have previously been excluded in some cases from interfaith dialogue, including women and young people. The teaching of different religions, belief systems and spiritual traditions is essential to breaking down the walls of ignorance. While the teaching of the history of religions will inevitably take place in a particular cultural context, the approach adopted should be inclusive and ideally not confined to the monotheistic traditions. In this sense, there is a need to foster competences and skills in interfaith dialogue in the wider context of furthering intercultural understanding.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.3 What is religious pluralism?

Religious pluralism is a condition of society in which numerous distinct ethnic, religious, or cultural groups coexist within one nation.<sup>8</sup>

The Melton Interfaith Network has run some successful activities to bring faith groups together. Representative from an interfaith network

The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterise every part of the world today.

Harvard University discusses four points about religious pluralism<sup>9</sup>:

- *Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettos with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.*
- *Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.*
- *Pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.*
- *Pluralism is based on dialogue. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table — with one’s commitments.*

The themes and actions of the Strategy will be based on the above concepts to assist us with our work in the interfaith space to build relationship and capacity and foster collaboration and build partnership.

## 4. City of Melton demographics

The City of Melton is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia. In 2018 its estimated population was 153,120 with an annual growth rate of 4%.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO World Report Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue [http://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing\\_in\\_cultural\\_diversity.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing_in_cultural_diversity.pdf)

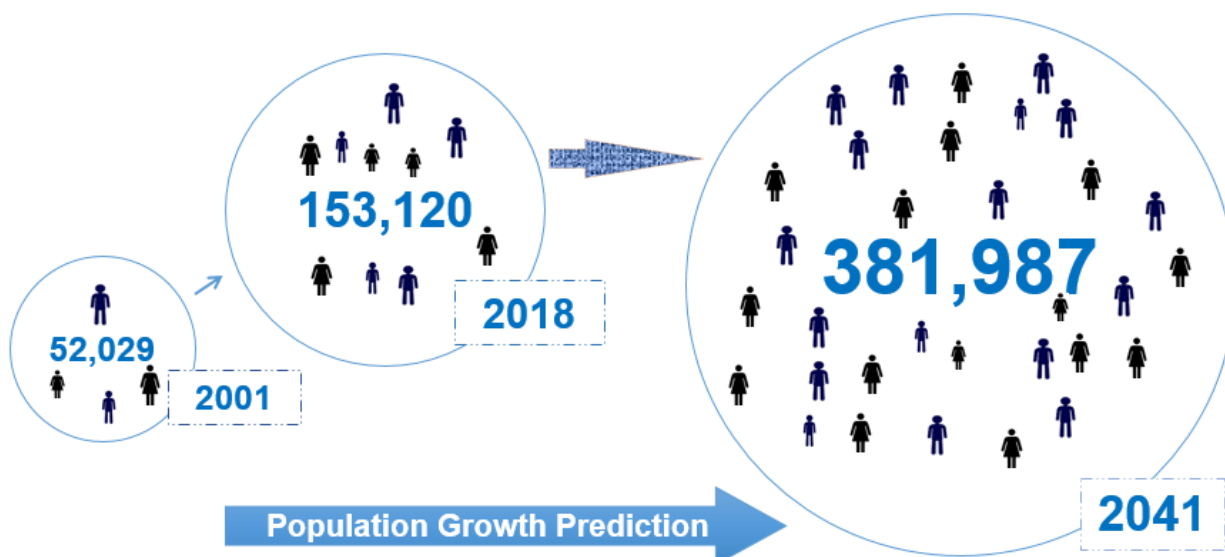
<sup>8</sup> [http://www.religioustolerance.org/rel\\_plur1.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/rel_plur1.htm)

<sup>9</sup> The Pluralism Project, Harvard University <http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/>

<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics - compiled and presented in profile.id by id, the population experts.



The population projection indicates that by 2041 the City will have more than 381,987 residents, adding to the City's rich cultural diversity. The increase in population will bring with it additional needs as our City grows and changes to include new activity centres, more jobs, houses, industry and recreational facilities. As suburbs develop, new residents will move into the area bringing with them the desire to express their cultural and religious identity. Existing communities will grow and adapt to accommodate new interests and opportunities. This presents an ongoing opportunity for the City of Melton, and will allow us to continue into the future as an increasingly global community.



#### 4.1 Religion

The City of Melton presents a higher level of religious adherence than Greater Melbourne, with 68.9% of the City of Melton population professing a religious affiliation, as opposed to 60.1% in Greater Melbourne.<sup>11</sup>

Religious affiliation is the self-identified association of a person with a religion, denomination or sub-denominational religious group.<sup>12</sup>

City of Melton - Total persons (Usual residence)	2016			2011			Change 2011 to 2016
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<sup>11</sup> Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2011 and 2016. Compiled and presented by .id, the population experts. (Usual residence data)

<sup>12</sup> Stats NZ - [http://www.stats.govt.nz/about\\_us/who-we-are.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/about_us/who-we-are.aspx)

The largest of these groups, as per the 2016 census, is Roman Catholic, with large communities (over 2,500 individuals) also of Anglican, Muslim, Christian (nfd), Hindu, Greek Orthodox, Buddhist, Sikh and Uniting Church adherents. The fastest growing faiths (numerically) are Roman Catholicism, Islam, Christianity (nfd), Hinduism and Sikhism. People belonging to these faith groups, especially those newly emerging, have expressed a desire to better connect with and support the local community. However, anecdotal feedback has shown that it can be difficult for new faith groups to establish connections with existing institutions – be they religious, schools, clubs, or other. This may reflect a general trend of initial community fragmentation as is common in a rapid growth area such as this, but is likely exacerbated by some hesitance, or in some cases animosity, of the existing community to accept faith diversity into a previously more religiously homogenous context.

## 4.2 Religion ranked by size

### Religion - Ranked by size<sup>13</sup>

City of Melton - Total persons (Usual residence)	2016			2011			Change 2011 to 2016
	Number	%	Greater Melbourne %	Number	%	Greater Melbourne %	
Western (Roman) Catholic	44,348	32.7	23.2	40,152	36.7	27.1	+4,196
Anglican	8,773	6.5	7.6	10,005	9.2	10.8	-1,232
Islam	5,424	4.0	4.2	4,126	3.8	3.6	+1,298
Christian,nfd	5,049	3.7	2.6	2,079	1.9	1.9	+2,970
Hinduism	3,690	2.7	2.9	2,077	1.9	2.0	+1,613
Greek Orthodox	3,644	2.7	3.5	3,257	3.0	4.0	+387
Buddhism	3,617	2.7	3.8	3,045	2.8	4.0	+572
Sikhism	2,539	1.9	1.1	933	0.9	0.7	+1,606
Uniting Church	2,513	1.9	2.3	3,001	2.7	3.4	-488
Pentecostal	2,029	1.5	0.9	1,300	1.2	0.9	+729
Macedonian Orthodox	1,709	1.3	0.4	1,492	1.4	0.5	+217
Presbyterian and Reformed	1,687	1.2	1.6	1,792	1.6	2.1	-105
Baptist	1,431	1.1	1.3	1,224	1.1	1.5	+207
Coptic Orthodox	870	0.6	0.2	531	0.5	0.2	+339
Jehovah's Witnesses	677	0.5	0.2	668	0.6	0.3	+9
Other Protestant	663	0.5	0.4	464	0.4	0.3	+199
Serbian Orthodox	579	0.4	0.2	491	0.4	0.3	+88
Latter Day Saints (Mormons)	527	0.4	0.2	354	0.3	0.2	+173
Seventh Day Adventist	479	0.4	0.2	303	0.3	0.2	+176
Other Oriental Orthodox	450	0.3	0.1	215	0.2	0.1	+235
Lutheran	412	0.3	0.3	556	0.5	0.6	-144
Other Eastern Catholic	180	0.1	0.2	54	0.0	0.1	+126
Salvation Army	169	0.1	0.1	232	0.2	0.2	-63
Brethren	160	0.1	0.0	147	0.1	0.1	+13
Other Eastern Orthodox	153	0.1	0.1	1,420	1.3	0.5	-1,267

In addition to individual faith adherence, a number of faith based schools operate in the municipality, some reflecting the new emergence of previously underrepresented religious groups, notably Islam.

<sup>13</sup> Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Census of Population and Housing](#) 2011 and 2016. Compiled and presented by [.id](#), the population experts. Excludes religions with fewer than 20 adherents, or less than 0.1% of the total population.

A growing number of people practicing Hinduism and Sikhism are making the City of Melton their home. Sri Durga, one of Australia's biggest Hindu temples, Sri Murgan, another Hindu temple, and Khalsa Shaouni, a Sikh Gurdwara (a place of worship) are located in the municipality.

Currently the municipality has the following faith-based schools: Al Iman College, Melton South (Islam); Australian International Academy, Caroline Springs (Islam); Heathdale Christian College, Melton (Christian); Catholic Regional College, Melton (Catholic); Melton Christian College, Melton (Christian); Gilson College, Taylors Hill (Christian).



## 5. Community and key agencies consultation

To develop the Interfaith Strategy, faith community members and groups, faith leaders and key stakeholders with specialist knowledge about the interfaith related matters and policy environment were consulted, relevant literature was reviewed and Council's strategic directions were considered.

Melton City Council recognises that community participation and engagement are a vital part of local democracy. Consultations with community and key stakeholder agencies were held to give them a meaningful way to participate and contribute to the development of the plan.

Focus groups and individual interviews were the main ways information was collected.

Community and key stakeholder agencies consulted included faith based organisations, networks and groups, local service providers, relevant state government bodies, local community leaders and Council staff.

Meaningful opportunity for people to meet and dialogue including people from diverse backgrounds.  
Representative from State Government

Themes covered during consultation included community challenges, interfaith, interfaith/ religious literacy, capacity building, social cohesion, community harmony, collaboration and partnership.

In-depth Interviews and focus groups were conducted with representatives from a broad range of faith groups and organisations.

In addition, internal in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant Council departments.

A summary of the consultation process is available in the appendix section of this Strategy.

## 6. Timeline



## 7. Policy context

Council's Interfaith Strategy 2018/2021 is developed considering relevant international, national and State policies.

### International policy context

**The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981) (The Religious Declaration), United Nations<sup>14</sup>**

#### Article 1

1. *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.*

2. *No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.*

3. *Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.*

#### Article 6

*In accordance with article 1 of the present Declaration, and subject to the provisions of article 1, paragraph 3, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief shall include, inter alia, the following freedoms:*

- a) *To worship or assemble in connexion with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes;*
- b) *To establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions;*
- c) *To make, acquire and use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief;*
- d) *To write, issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas;*
- e) *To teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes;*

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/36/a36r055.htm>

- f) *To solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions;*
- g) *To train, appoint, elect or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief;*
- h) *To observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief;*
- i) *To establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels.*

## **Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), UNESCO**

### *Article 2 – From cultural diversity to cultural pluralism*

*In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life.*

### *Article 3 – Cultural diversity as a factor in development*

*Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.*

### *Article 4 – Human rights as guarantees of cultural diversity*

*The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples. No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope.*

## **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), United Nations**

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the inherent dignity of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Article 2 of the Declaration states that *'Everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.'*

Availability of multi-faith/quiet rooms at Council's facilities where people can practice their faith if they wish to. Melton Interfaith Network

## **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>15</sup>**

### *Article 18.*

*1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.*

<sup>15</sup> Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 19 December 1996

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20999/volume-999-I-14668-English.pdf>

2. *No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.*

3. *Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.*

4. *The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.*

## **National**

### **Australian Human Rights Commission Act (1986), Parliament of Australia**

Makes discrimination for reason of race unlawful.

### **Racial Discrimination Act (1975), Parliament of Australia**

Enshrines equity in law, regardless of race, national or ethnic background.

### **The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy (2013), Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services)**

The Australian Government has no tolerance for racism and discrimination.

### **Multicultural Access and Equity Policy (2015), Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services)**

Guides equitable access to government services.

### **National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy (2012), Australian Human Rights Commission**

Aims to increase awareness and improve anti-racism practices.

### **Services for All: Promoting Access and Equity in Local Government (undated), Australian Local Government Association**

Access and equity practice resource for local governments.

## **Victorian**

### **Multicultural Victoria Act (2011), Parliament of Victoria**

A framework of cultural diversity principles

Preamble – (1) The Parliament recognises and values the cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity of the people of Victoria.

### **Victorian Charter of Rights and Responsibilities (2006), Parliament of Victoria**

Provides a mechanism to measure actions and decisions made by an organisation.

### **Racial and Religious Tolerance Act (2001), Parliament of Victoria**

Makes it illegal to vilify anyone on the grounds of race or religion.

### **Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (2010), Parliament of Victoria**

Holistically protects people's rights to equal opportunities.

### **Victoria's Advantage: Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship Policy (2014), Victorian Government**

A whole of government commitment to culturally diverse communities with details on objectives and commitments.

## Local

### Local Government Act (1989)

Outlines the role and responsibilities of Local Governments in Victoria.

#### Section 3C: Objectives of a Council

- (1) The primary objective of a Council is to endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions.
- (2) In seeking to achieve its primary objective, a Council must have regard to the following facilitating objectives
  - (e) to ensure that services and facilities provided by the Council are accessible and equitable.

#### Section 3D: What is the role of a Council?

- (1) The role of a Council includes
  - (a) acting as a representative government by taking into account the diverse needs of the local community in decision making;
  - (d) advocating the interests of the local community to other communities and governments;
  - (f) fostering community cohesion and encouraging active participation in civic life.'

### MAV Statement of Commitment to Cultural Diversity (2012), Municipal Association Victoria

Outlines the commitment and support the MAV provides to local government actions to positively influencing cultural diversity.

## Melton City Council

### Council Plan 2017-21

Our community is at the heart of everything we do. Council is committed to supporting a strong and inclusive community that elicits pride. The Council and Wellbeing Plan describes how Council sees the development of the City in years to come, describing its vision for – A Thriving Community Where Everyone Belongs. This vision is underpinned by five themes:

Theme one - A proud, inclusive and safe community

Theme two - A thriving and resilient natural environment

Theme three - A well planned and built City

Theme four - A strong local economy and lifelong learning City

Theme five - A high performing organisation - demonstrating leadership and advocacy

### Intercultural Plan 2017-21

Under the key theme of *Embrace Cultural Diversity* and its associated actions specifically Initiative 1.3: *Promote religious harmony, dialogue and cooperation between various faith groups - 1.3.1 Support Melton Interfaith Network to develop and extend - 1.3.2 Create and promote a calendar of significant religious and cultural events* Council will provide a platform where individuals and community groups from diverse backgrounds can learn more about the values, beliefs and traditions of their neighbours, and also be supported to educate other residents about their own culture. This will promote further understanding and connection in the community.

### Libraries Strategic Plan 2015-2018

Theme 1: Adaptable people and partnerships – we work to provide connections between people and organisations to deliver opportunities which support great service delivery and the development of a well-connected, diverse and confident community

Theme 2: Diverse information, resources and tools – we provide access to a wide range of information, physical and virtual resources and useful tools to enable the whole community to develop their knowledge and skills, satisfy their curiosity and learning needs and be able to enjoy a range of quality leisure experiences.



**A City for All People: a strategy plan for children, youth, older people and people with experience of disability 2017-2021**

Theme 1: Being inclusive

Our community have told us that local spaces, places and services need to be universally accessible. Our built and natural environments need to be physically accessible, safe and inclusive for all ages and abilities. Likewise, services need to be timely, flexible in their service provision, welcoming and age and culturally appropriate. We need to ensure quality services and the right services are available for all ages, life stages and abilities.

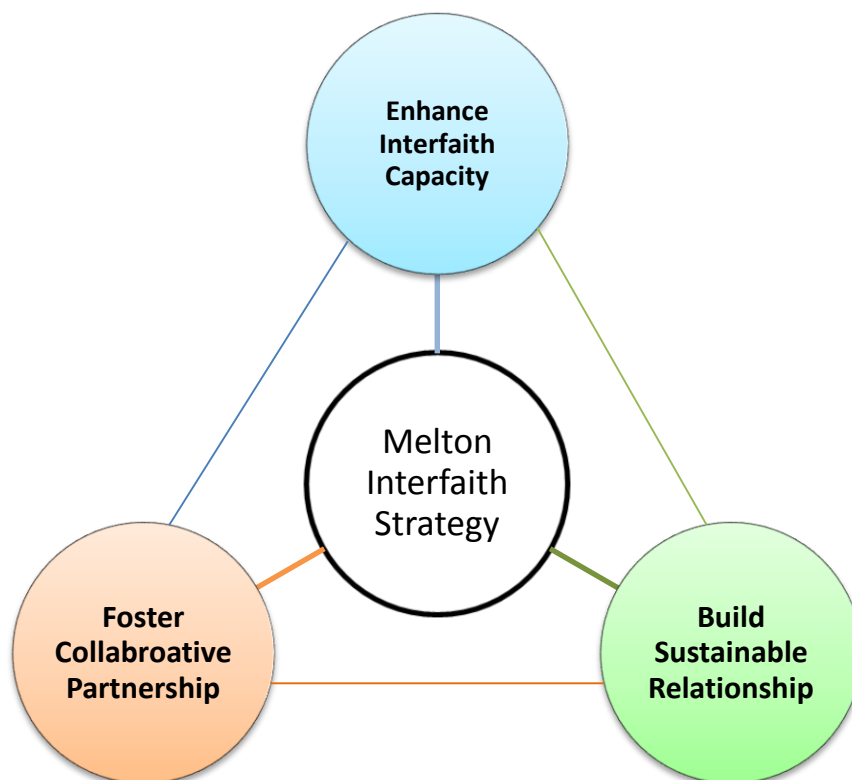
Reflect faiths in Council plans and design capacity building towards interfaith admin, venue support, make faith groups aware of Council's grant programs and services and benefits to faith communities. Representative of an interfaith network



## 8. Interfaith strategy key focus areas

The key focus areas of the Strategy came into being following consultation with faith groups, faith leaders and key stakeholders with specialist knowledge on interfaith matters. These focus areas are complementary to Council's Intercultural Plan 201/2021 providing a consistent approach to achieving a community harmony.

- Build sustainable relationship
- Enhance interfaith capacity
- Foster collaborative partnership



### 8.1 Build sustainable relationship

Council believes relationships are the cornerstones of all community. Building sustainable relationship in an interfaith environment is a process where people get to know and trust each other. It further adds value and wealth to our work and lives. Relationship building is a key principle of interfaith work.

Thus, Council will focus on this area to work with faith groups and general community to achieve sustainable and mutually fair and beneficial relationships by sharing information with and facilitating interaction between faith groups and general community. This will assist Council and faith groups to achieve a socially cohesive community. It will further link people from different faith backgrounds to stay in touch with one another and continue to enrich each other's experience of faith.

"Interfaith doesn't mean abandoning one's own faith to unite in another combined faith but means respecting everyone's rights to have their own faith." Local faith leader

The actions of this focus area are aligned with a number of Key Actions of Council's Intercultural Plan.

## 8.2 Enhance interfaith capacity

Capacity building was of the areas strongly recommended by individuals, faith groups and organisations who were consulted in the process of developing the Strategy.

The aim of this focus area is to work with the faith groups and general community to strengthen their competencies, skills, networks and resources to accomplish greater potential where faith groups and communities work in an environment of respect, honesty and freedom towards a harmonious community.

Council will continue to facilitate the process of building the capacity of faith groups so that they will be able to perform their core functions as community organisations and develop programs with the aim of promoting cooperative and positive relationship to achieve a peaceful society.

This will also address the capacity of Council as a local government authority in the area of interfaith. Council will continue to invest in the area of capacity building of its staff enabling them to successfully undertake their day to day tasks to meet the growing needs of our community.

This focus area of the Strategy is closely linked with numerous Key Actions of Council's Intercultural Plan.



### 8.3 Foster collaborative partnership

The consultation process proved that collaboration and partnership were the major areas echoed repeatedly in responses of people we consulted with.

Building on the strength and breath of our collaborative partnership with faith groups and general communities, Council will remain committed to working with faith groups and general community to promote social cohesion through strengthening collaboration and partnership.

Through a collaborative partnership faith groups and general community will be able to achieve outcomes for the entire community through joint decision making, sharing ideas, efforts and resources in an inclusive atmosphere. The aim of this focus area is to nurture collaboration and partnership in the community.

Considerably this area of the Strategy are connected with a few of the Key Actions of Council's Intercultural Plan.

Make people from diverse faith groups feel more welcome and give them a sense of belonging. Melton Interfaith Network



## 9. Melton interfaith strategy

Focus area	Strategy	Timeline	Performance Indicators
<b>8.1 Build sustainable relationship</b>	8.1.1 Develop a perpetual Memorandum of Understanding with the Melton Interfaith Network (MIN)	2018	Memorandum of Understanding signed
	8.1.2 Engage with the MIN and faith groups in the City of Melton to get them involved in Council's programs and events such as Djerriwarrh Festival, Harmony Day and Refugee Week	Ongoing	The MIN and faith groups actively engaged in Council's programs and Djerriwarrh Festival, Harmony Day and Refugee Week events
	8.1.3 Profile the MIN on Council's website	2018	A page created on Council's website to profile the MIN
	8.1.4 Implement the relevant Key Action 1.3.1 <i>Support Melton Interfaith Network to develop and extend fortifies Council's commitment to continuing to work in the interfaith space and support local initiatives in this area</i> of the Intercultural Plan 2017/2021	2017-2021	Key Action of the Intercultural Plan implemented
<b>8.2 Enhance interfaith capacity</b>	8.2.1 Develop a database of contact details of places of worship and faith based schools and organisations to be updated annually and available on Council's website	2018	Interfaith database developed and uploaded on Council's website

	8.2.3 Run intercultural/interfaith capacity building workshops for Council employees to build their capacity to consider the growing needs of our faith groups and communities while planning and delivering programs	Ongoing	Intercultural/interfaith capacity building workshops delivered
	8.2.4 Facilitate capacity building workshops on areas of interfaith leadership for the MIN members. This could be done via linking the MIN with the online resources such as Interfaith Youth Core's online interfaith leadership training modules.	Ongoing	Presentations on interfaith areas to the MIN delivered and online resources shared
	8.2.5 Continue to work with Council's Venues Team to engage with faith based groups to ensure Council's venues are available to faith based groups for hire on an equitable and accessible basis	Ongoing	Based on the Venues Policies and Procedures faith groups are supported to access Council's facilities
<b>8.3 Foster collaborative partnership</b>	8.3.1 Develop partnership with the MIN through co-design and co-facilitation of interfaith programs	Ongoing	Based on availability of funding Programs developed and delivered in partnership with the MIN
	8.3.2 Work with faith groups in the municipality to encourage them to join the MIN and participate in their programs and events e.g. bus tour of places of worship and interfaith dinners	Ongoing	At least two new faith groups joined the MIN

## **Acknowledgements**

Melton City Council thanks all those from the local community, faith community groups, community service organisations, peak organisations, other local government authorities and individuals who have contributed their time and information to the development of this report.

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All available from <http://www.melton.vic.gov.au>



## **Appendix 1**

To develop the Interfaith Strategy, community members and key stakeholders with specialist knowledge on interfaith related matters and policy environment were consulted, relevant literature was reviewed and Council's strategic directions were considered.

Melton City Council recognises that community participation and engagement are a vital part of local democracy. Consultations with community and key stakeholder agencies were held to give them a meaningful way to participate and contribute to the development of the plan. Focus groups and individual interviews were the main ways information was collected.

Community and key stakeholder agencies consulted included faith based organisations, networks and groups, local service providers, relevant state government bodies, local community leaders and Council staff.

### **Focus Groups and In-depth Interviews**

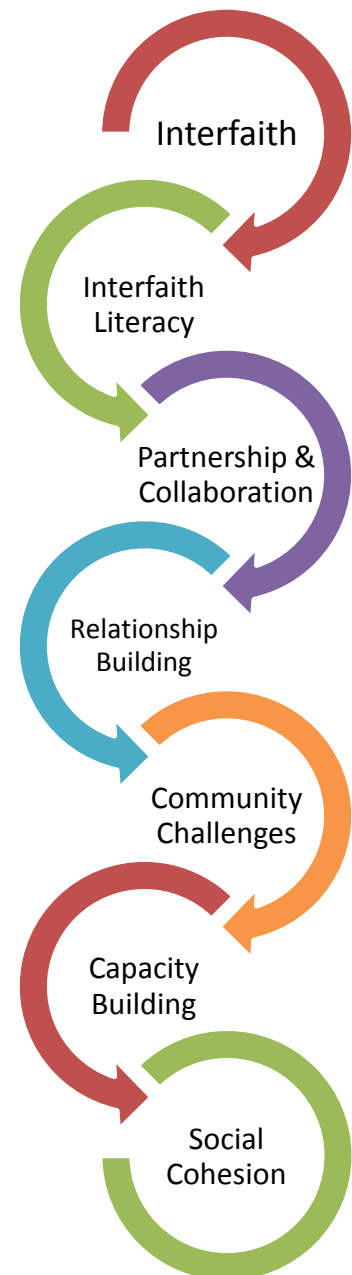
In-depth Interviews and focus groups were conducted with representatives from the following faith groups and organisations:

- Djerriwarrh Health Services
- Wyndham Interfaith Network
- Brimbank and Maribyrnong Interfaith Network
- Darebin Interfaith Network
- Wyndham Community and Education Centre
- Melton Interfaith Network
- Interfaith Centre of Melbourne
- Maribyrnong City Council
- Moreland City Council
- Brimbank City Council
- Amazing Church - Melton
- Al Iman College, Melton
- Staughton College, Melton
- South Sudanese Community Melton
- Melton City Council's African Communities Working Group
- Melton City Council's Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Community Advisory Committee
- Faith Communities Council of Victoria
- Sri Durga Hindu Temple
- Catholic Church – Parish of Melton
- Uniting Church – Melton
- Melton Baha'i Community
- Djerriwarrh Community and Education
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Health and Human Services/ Centrelink
- Dandenong Interfaith Network
- Catholic Regional College, Melton
- Relevant Council Departments
- Multicultural Affairs & Social Cohesion/ Community Resilience Unit

Participants were asked to reflect on the following questions.

1. What are the key issues impacting faith communities in general and faith groups specifically living in the City of Melton?
2. What do you think is needed to create a more inclusive and embracing community in the City of Melton where faith groups and communities live/interact with each other in harmony?
3. What do you believe should be the key priority areas for Council to support faith based groups and communities in the City of Melton?
4. What do you believe should be the key priority areas for Council as an organisation to focus on/ improve in matters related to interfaith i.e. existing and new community facilities, planning of new towns etc.
5. What do you think fosters understanding and promotes social cohesion and interfaith interaction and how can the Strategy address that?
6. How could faith leaders foster collaboration between faith groups, communities and City of Melton service providers?
7. Broadly speaking what else would you like Melton City Council Interfaith Strategy 2018-2021 to cover?

### Themes covered in the interviews and focus groups



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