



15.5 Harnessing “Employee Voice”: Establishing Employee Resource Groups



The best way to find out what matters to employees is to ask them. You can do this in a variety of ways: through employee engagement surveys, short and frequent pulse checks, focus groups as part of an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) audit, and via employee resource groups.

An employee resource group (ERG) is led by employees committed to cultivating an equitable, inclusive workplace culture that is understanding, empathetic, curious about, and respectful of diversity. ERGs are common; they exist in approximately 90% of Fortune 500 companies.

Nine Elements of Successful Employee Resource Groups

- 1. Leadership Support:** The success of an ERG is dependent on the support of senior leadership. An executive sponsor is considered a best practice of an ERG. Oversight by human resources is recommended, not to dictate the focus or work of the ERG but to provide guidance and support. Ensure that managers are aware of the organization’s commitment to the ERG, its purpose, and the investment required of employee members to support their employee(s) attendance and participation.
- 2. Membership Criteria:** Membership should be voluntary and open. Establish and agree upon things such as meeting attendance, required participation, accountability, and confidentiality.
- 3. Charter:** A well-crafted charter provides an ERG with a structure to understand and carry out its purpose, goals, and objectives. It is intended to be an organic document which may change as diversity, equity, and inclusion issues change. A charter should include the Mission or Vision statement of the ERG also.
- 4. Set Goals:** Establish goals and create the metrics required to measure progress. Measures may include number of diversity initiatives impacted, number of events/awareness campaigns, membership numbers, and level of employee understanding of EDI issues. Yes, what gets measured gets done!

- 5. Funding:** Many ERGs do not require funding or if they do, it may be a nominal amount; this is dependent upon mandate and scope of work. A budget, however, can also underline the commitment to the ERG and its purpose by the organization. Employee participation should always be on paid work time and additional compensation paid if outside of normal work hours. Some organizations are moving towards providing an increase in salary for those who participate in an ERG.
- 6. Internal and External Alliances and Partnerships:** Diversity and inclusion initiatives, programs and ideas may benefit from establishing partnerships or alliances with external stakeholders, such as a community organization or educational institution. This can be mutually beneficial to ERG members, the organization, and the external partner organization.
- 7. A trusting, safe space is vital:** An ERG is a place where sensitive topics will be raised and discussed. A healthy, psychologically safe environment is one where underrepresented employees and ERG members can have their voices heard. Take time at the start to agree upon and reinforce inclusive behaviors (i.e.: respect differences of opinion – agree to disagree; confidentiality; encourage sharing of personal experiences; practice empathy, vulnerability and build trust; choose curiosity over judgement).
- 8. Create Transparency:** ERGs must hold themselves accountable to their fellow employees. They can do this by seeking feedback, engaging allies, and – importantly - reporting on their efforts to employees and leadership.
- 9. Prioritize Diversity:** This might seem obvious but it's something that is often overlooked: ensure that your ERG is reflective of the diversity in your organization. Look at the membership - who is not at the table who should be? Whose voices need to be heard to ensure true equity and inclusion?

Disclaimer:

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