



CATALYST

ERG Guide

Cultivating ERG support and collaboration

Executive summary

ERGs don't exist in a vacuum. They are part of a larger organizational and community ecosystem, so it is essential for them to partner with other stakeholders to ensure alignment and garner support. The ideas listed below will help you develop plans to connect with and leverage the expertise, networks, and backing of various potential collaborators.

Getting buy-in from senior and middle managers

Successful ERGs have strong support from both senior and middle management.

- Senior managers are important because in addition to the direct assistance they can provide ERGs, top-level champions help build support among middle management simply by making their attitudes known.
- Middle managers, on the other hand, are the people who implement the strategies designed by organizational leadership, and any ERG activities intended to have a broad impact on the organization must be supported by them. These managers support the ERG by encouraging members to participate and helping promote opportunities for ERG members.

Below, we list some strategies and related actions you can take to win buy-in from both key constituencies.

Meet with senior leaders to build relationships.

Action steps:

Introduce the ERG's mission, goals, and annual strategic plan.

Outline the business case for the ERG and how it will help the organization.

Discuss business concerns and opportunities; offer specifics on how the ERG can play a role in product feedback and deepening customer and community connections.

Understand concerns about the ERG and reinforce the ERG's importance in connecting leadership with the ERG membership base and meeting business goals.

Explain how senior leaders can help the ERG by acting as champions, attending events, sending emails, speaking at ERG events, and informally advising the ERG.

Ask for guidance and input on the ERG's business plan.

Connect with senior leaders in smaller social settings, which may help them become comfortable with the leadership abilities of the ERG team.

Present to the organizational leadership team as a group.

Action steps:

Provide a forum for ERG leaders to gain visibility for the ERG.

Describe how the ERG helps the organization uphold its core values and meet its strategic goals.

Describe upcoming activities.

Clarify what the ERG is — and is not. Allay any concerns and assure leaders the ERG is proactive and business focused.

Agree on appropriate methods and frequency for ongoing communication. This may include an annual meeting, written updates, or an identified management liaison.

Demonstrate to managers how the ERG can benefit teams.

Action steps:

Discuss the developmental, networking, and mentoring opportunities available for direct reports who are members.

Provide information on resources or external opportunities for training.

Measure engagement and retention rates of ERG members vs. non-ERG members.

Facilitate skill-building workshops.

Find creative vehicles to communicate these benefits to managers.

Action steps:

Host managerial meetings or annual “meet the ERG” workshops.

Ask ERG members to inform their departments about ERG activities.

Include articles in organization’s newsletters.

Distribute an ERG newsletter to middle managers.

Display flyers for events in high-traffic areas.

Organizational support and collaboration

Forming connections with other areas of the organization ensures support for the ERG's mission and activities from several quarters. Other ERGs, Human Resources, the People and Culture office, talent management practitioners, community, and other areas of the business — especially those involved in marketing and product development — will have a stake in ERG activities because of the potential overlap in efforts to engage the employee and customer bases. To be successful, the ERG should demonstrate how its activities augment those of other initiatives, and the ERG's charter, strategic plan, and annual calendar should reflect the importance of relationships with all these groups.

When reaching out to these audiences, the ERG should highlight the ways it can benefit the different parts of the organization. A concise strategic plan of action, detailing goals, accountabilities, and expected outcomes for three to four areas of focus will help manage expectations and prioritize ERG members' time and energy. Once the strategic plan is determined, the ERG's communications team should share it with each audience, addressing its specific concerns.

- At **Boston Scientific**, the presence of ERG Leads on the Global Council for Inclusion means that they have direct access to senior leaders and can provide members with insights into organizational strategy. These ERG Leads also receive critical visibility opportunities that advance their own careers as well as compensation for their additional responsibilities with the ERGs.¹

ERGs and HR/People and Culture office

The relationship between the ERG and HR or the People and Culture office has the potential to be strong and collaborative. The coordinating office can play a significant role in starting an ERG and supporting its goals and mission.

When working with HR and/or People and Culture representatives, ERG leaders should highlight the benefits of a partnership. For example, joint efforts may utilize the advice of the ERG constituency to garner new support from management for long-term HR/People and Culture goals.

- Each of **The Hartford's** nine ERGs has an HR partner on the leadership team as well as an executive sponsor. With the ERGs' events for constituent groups, learning programs, and internal and external networks, they are an invaluable source for recruiting.²

Other strategies that may be useful include:

- **Clarifying roles.** The collaboration between an ERG and HR/People and Culture office is enhanced when roles are clarified at the outset and then revised over time. For ERGs with a stated mission of acting as an advisory body, articulating how the ERG's strategy and goals relate to HR and People and Culture goals can be useful in defining roles. Be clear about where the ERG's role of identifying issues and solutions ends and where HR's implementation role begins.
- **Determining responsibilities and accountability.** Decide together which current and planned activities HR is responsible for, and which the ERG will manage. The ERG should support HR/People and Culture activities, not reinvent the wheel or duplicate services. Sometimes this will mean foregoing certain activities, such as coaching or mentoring initiatives, because they belong to the HR function. In addition, determine accountability for goals. Who is responsible for which training and development activities? Who defines what the ERG is responsible for? For example, usually, a women's ERG plays a role in the advancement of women, but it should not be held accountable for women's advancement; senior leadership and managers should be held accountable.
- At **Zoetis**, senior leaders who are CRG sponsors are evaluated on how well they've performed these responsibilities during their official feedback and performance conversations.³
- **Meeting on a regular basis with HR/People and Culture representatives.** Inform HR of the ERG's mission, how its activities will fulfill the mission, and the impact of those activities. Quarterly or semiannual meetings with HR leadership provide ERG leaders with an opportunity to seek advice and guidance on managing and positioning the ERG locally.
- **Including HR/People and Culture staff on ERG committees.** If meeting with HR every few months isn't enough, the ERG may want to invite HR staff to participate as formal members of various committees.
- **Participating in HR/People and Culture initiatives to share information.** The ERG should fully participate in any relevant councils, annual events, or cross- ERG leadership caucuses convened by HR to share internal best practices and initiative updates.
- **Sephora's** INCommunities align their work with the company's DE&I strategy and contribute to its success by participating in activities such as targeted recruiting and providing feedback on company campaigns.⁴

Other ERGs and ERG umbrella organizations

An organization with many ERGs should consider creating an umbrella council to encourage leaders and members of the ERGs to meet and share information. This is common practice, and most ERGs collaborate with other ERGs at their organizations. In some organizations, HR or the People and Culture office develops a cross-ERG structure. For example, a representative or two from each ERG may sit on a global or national council. This structure allows ERG leaders to become more integrated in their approaches and activities and can increase their collective impact on the organization.

There are several ways ERGs can work together to achieve mutual goals and enhance effectiveness. ERG leaders may meet monthly or quarterly to share insights and best practices and to uncover common issues or challenges. However, it can be difficult to agree on how to prioritize issues across multiple groups. The goal should be to identify commonalities while still voicing unique issues.

Ideally, ERGs are resources for one another. For example, an ERG for women is often the first to be started at an organization. The women's ERG can then be a resource to other ERGs as they form. The leaders of the women's ERG make this happen by meeting with the organizers of new ERGs to share their history, ideas about structure and strategies, and lessons learned.

ERG leaders in organizations that have not created a cross-ERG structure should realize that building partnerships takes time, and it is helpful to start with smaller projects. Once relationships are established, the ERG can start to pursue more complex collaborations with other ERGs.

ERGs can collaborate in many ways, including:

- Promoting and attending one another's events.
- Conducting joint open houses to recruit new members and share progress with the organization.
- Sponsoring events together (e.g., external speakers, brown bag lunches, ERG celebrations).
- Hosting an annual celebration.
- Identifying recipients of a champion award.
- Advising HR on inclusion issues at the organization.
- Serving together on the organization's inclusion council.
- Sharing best practices and lessons learned.

Community

Many organizations leverage ERGs to link employees to their communities while enhancing the brand and supporting business. The community includes clients and customers, prospective and current business partners, suppliers, professional associations, prospective employees, former employees, nonprofit organizations, and people supported by corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. This outreach contributes to CSR, builds reputational capital in the marketplace, and favorably impacts the perception of the employer in the communities and markets it serves.

Additionally, activities in the community can build visibility for the ERG within the organization and lead to increased membership and senior management support. ERGs may participate in and/or sponsor community events that allow them to support the community, forge relationships with local organizations, and meet and get to know other professionals. By acting as ambassadors in their communities, ERG members can strengthen their connections within the organization.

Some ERGs have a committee that develops partnerships with local organizations with similar interests and goals. This committee may focus primarily on philanthropic activities, recruitment of a certain population, or engaging customers and clients. Examples of how ERGs have forged community relations are:

- At **Bank of America**, the LEAD For Women employee network (LEAD) wanted to go above and beyond typical network activities. In 2016, the network began partnering with the Domestic Violence Task Force, which has hosted more than 100 training sessions to educate employees about how domestic violence impacts communities and employees, the resources and partnerships available to those affected, and national and local volunteer opportunities. The Life Event Services team, in partnership with the Task Force, has assisted nearly 1,500 employees since 2016 — it has helped employees file restraining orders, provided emergency funds for transportation to shelters, offered guidance on how to talk to coworkers who appear to be in trouble, advised on how to make safety plans, connected to back-up childcare resources to be utilized during a last-minute move, and given suggestions on how to support a family member, among many other services.⁵

Explore the guide

- Key ERG concepts
- Developing an ERG
- Establishing ERG governance and structure
- ERG programming and initiatives
- ERG communications
- Building and growing ERG membership
- Common ERG challenges and solutions
- Measuring ERG success

1. [*Boston Scientific: Accelerating progress for women by creating equal opportunities for growth: Practices.*](#) (2022). Catalyst.
2. [*The Hartford: A deliberate and courageous transformation: Practices.*](#) (2023). Catalyst.
3. [*Zoetis: Awareness & action drive impact: The Zoetis diversity, equity, and inclusion journey: Practices.*](#) (2024). Catalyst.
4. *Bank of America—Investing in women (Practices).* (2019). Catalyst.
5. [*Sephora: DE&I heart journey: Practices.*](#) (2024). Catalyst.

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