

CATALYST

ERG Guide

Building and growing ERG membership

Executive summary

Recruiting members should be a priority for an ERG, and increased membership is one way for ERG leaders to gauge success. Making the ERG accessible to employees at different work sites, on different work schedules, and across levels is beneficial if the ERG wants to help bolster a more inclusive workplace. Use the following guidance to strategically expand ERG membership and drive impact.

ERG membership

ERGs, by definition, are a resource for employees. Some ERGs may decide to focus on a specific subsection of employees based on level or function, for example. A group of women in sales or in science is not unusual, nor are groups focused on the development needs of people at a particular career level. In another approach, a broad ERG may act as an umbrella organization for a variety of subgroups. For example, a women's ERG may have one subcommittee focused on career development, and another focused on allyship. This structure can provide the best opportunity for meeting diverse members' needs.

Many ERGs open membership to all employees. For example, a women's ERG membership can be open to everyone and especially encourage men allies to join, or an LGBTQ+ group can be open to straight allies in the workplace. Inclusive membership allows employees to step beyond their own identities and expand their circle of contacts, influence, and skills. Moreover, open membership broadens the potential audience. At **Medtronic**, all ERGs are open to all employees, regardless of gender or ethnicity; in fact, broad participation is encouraged so that all employees can benefit from their offerings, which include mentoring, networking, professional development, and work-life integration resources.¹ At **Barilla**, every ERG is open to all, including those who work in their production plants.²

ERGs must also consider how to serve members across functions or departments and how to reach both office-based and frontline staff. Reaching people working from home and other geographical locations is important, too.

Growing through attraction and recruitment

Successful ERGs use many strategies to gain members throughout the life of an ERG. Think not only in terms of sheer numbers, but also about whether the membership has a representative mix of employees from a range of levels, functions, and demographics. Potential members generally belong to one of three groups.

Potential recruitment pools

Employees who know little about the ERG and have never been involved with the group, including new hires

This is the largest group of potential members and the most dispersed. Connecting with them takes broad communication efforts, like email blasts or office posters. Virtual events, social networking, and live streaming can connect dispersed members as well. Some ERGs have formal “meet the ERG” events annually, open to all potential members in the organization. These events often have two objectives: to convey information about the ERG and why participants should join (e.g., through a presentation by the ERG leader) and to allow participants to sample an ERG activity (e.g., by presenting a speaker on career management or a timely business topic).

Employees who may know about the group through colleagues who are members

These employees already understand the ERG’s mission and goals, so they may be less likely to be enticed by general events. Ask current members to speak directly with these potential members about their interest in joining the group. This approach is very effective because the membership message can be tailored individually. Because potential members already know current participants, the orientation process can be easier and can result in a more cohesive group. Relying only on this strategy can result in an insular group, so balance this approach with strategies that reach out to groups of individuals who have historically not been members of the ERG.

Former members who no longer attend events or participate in activities

This is an important category, even if none of the people the ERG approaches decides to re-engage with the ERG. They can be a bellwether for how the ERG is or is not fulfilling the needs of its members: their reasons for not participating are important data points that the ERG should use to reexamine or revitalize its strategy.

Tips to attract and recruit members

Connect with recently hired employees

- Integrate ERG introduction as part of new employee orientation or onboarding, allowing new hires to learn about and join ERGs in their first few weeks.
- Designate ERG buddies or ambassadors who reach out to new employees.
- Be clear that employees can join multiple ERGs.

Reach wide audiences

- Create ERG Slack/Teams channels and keep updated with content that drives discussions.
- Send invitations from the executive sponsor.
- Hold informational events for employees to “meet the ERG.”
- Host “bring a friend” events, encouraging current members to invite colleagues.
- Communicate about and invite employees to events through newsletters, emails, posters, and collaborative in-person and online meeting spaces.
- Invite senior leaders to speak at events, where their involvement will encourage additional attendees.

Promote benefits of ERG participation

- Publicly market how ERG involvement helps the individual and the organization.

Make it easy to attend events and join

- Consider offering different membership levels, ranging from core to ally.
- Streamline the joining process.

Work with Human Resources/People and Culture/Training and Development to incentivize membership

- Add ERG leadership roles to KPIs and performance goals as a leadership development objective.
- Add ERG program attendance to KPIs and performance goals as an education and development objective.
- Ensure attending educational ERG events counts as training credit.

Grow into other locations/functions

- Create toolkits to launch other chapters to reach more employees.
- If not already available, explore how frontline employees can be involved in ERGs.

Onboarding new ERG members

No matter how established the ERG is, it should have an approach for integrating and orienting new members. This could be through formal sessions for small groups or asynchronous “self-service” options. Make sure you share where to find or access essential information, such as ERG governance documents, leadership contact information, and upcoming events.

Remain open to hearing the ideas and interests of new members. Be flexible and try to balance the need for continuity within the group with the imperative of change and growth.

Sustaining and revitalizing membership

Established ERGs may struggle to engage the entire membership in meaningful activities. Keeping the current members involved and continuing to build the membership are two challenging tasks that are the lifeblood of the ERG and an ongoing leadership responsibility.

Ensure the ERG is meeting needs

- Survey employees to gauge their interest in participation and what activities they would attend.
- Survey ERG members annually to understand their needs, challenges, and ideas.
- Distribute feedback forms and sign-up sheets after events to evaluate who participates and where there is room for growth. For example, in a pharmaceutical company, do lab scientists attend events? In a women’s network, do participants reflect the full diversity of women in the organization?

Promote contributions of members

- Publicly recognize member contributions and successes.

ERGs and intersectionality

When building or evolving ERGs, it's important to consider that members are not homogenous or monolithic. Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how social identities overlap with one another. ERG leaders may need to be upskilled on the concepts of [intersectionality](#) to become adept at recognizing how their members' identities impact their daily lives. ERGs can play a role in exploring this topic and contributing to greater understanding.

- Develop programming in which people can discuss their different lived experiences.
- Collaborate with other ERGs on programming that explores intersectional experiences, such as Black women in leadership, or LGBTQ veterans.
- Consider designating a leadership role or subcommittee that focuses on intersectionality and checks to ensure the programming and commitments meet the needs of the entire membership.

Explore the guide

- Key ERG concepts
- Developing an ERG
- Establishing ERG governance and structure
- ERG programming and initiatives
- ERG communications
- Cultivating ERG support and collaboration
- Common ERG challenges and solutions
- Measuring ERG success

1. *Medtronic: Igniting women to lead through the Medtronic women's network.* (2020). Catalyst.
2. [*Barilla: An Italian family-owned company's journey to global inclusion: Practices.*](#) (2021). Catalyst.

How to cite this product: *Catalyst guide to Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).* (2025). Catalyst.

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