

CATALYST

ERG Guide

Key ERG concepts

Executive summary

ERGs are a potent tool for developing both employees and the business, and for creating a more inclusive workplace. But before you or your organization builds or refreshes your ERG strategy, it's important to have a strong understanding of what ERGs are, their role, and the many ways they benefit organizations and employees. The explanations and ideas below, which are supported by examples from real companies, will help you get started.

Introduction to ERGs

What are employee resource groups (ERGs)?

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led groups that are formed to act as a resource for both group members and their organization. ERGs serve an important role in providing connections among employees and are vital resources, especially in times of crisis. ERGs can have anywhere from a few members to a few thousand. They are typically based on a demographic (e.g., women), life stage (e.g., Gen Z), or function (e.g., sales), but they may also be based on other identities. They are dedicated to fostering a diverse and inclusive work environment within the context of the organization's mission, values, goals, business practices, and objectives.

Are ERGs the same as employee networks or affinity groups?

Catalyst uses the term “Employee Resource Group,” as do many Catalyst Supporter organizations. But organizations use a variety of terms in this space, and there is much overlap in meaning, with some differences depending on the organization and the maturity of initiative. Other common names include, but are not limited to: Employee Network, Affinity Group, Business Resource Group, Teammate Resource Group, and Colleague Resource Group.

What is an ERG's role within an organization?

ERGs can play many different roles, depending on their objectives and goals for the organization and their membership. ERGs may:

- Work with Human Resources (HR), People and Culture departments, and business functions to develop programs focused on recruitment and leadership development.
- Provide a source of mentors, role models, sponsors, and connections, as well as access to information about career strategies, opportunities, and advancement.
- Showcase and develop the leadership skills and professional expertise of their members.
- Serve as influential and trusted advisors to HR and leadership on workplace issues, policies, opportunities, and solutions.
- Partner with business leaders to develop new products and better understand and serve customers and the community.
- Organize and host educational, networking, community service, and other types of events.

What are examples of ERG constituencies?

Ability and wellness

- Disabled employees
- Neurodiverse employees
- Mental health

Age and life stage

- Experienced professionals
- Multigenerational
- Parents and caregivers
- Young professionals/emerging leaders

Function

- Sales
- Tech
- Frontline
- Field

Gender and sexual orientation

- Women employees
- LGBTQ2S+

Race, ethnicity, and culture

- Asian/Pacific Islander employees
- Black employees
- Indigenous employees
- Latine employees
- Immigrant and refugee employees
- Multicultural employees

Other

- Faith-based
- Global
- Sustainability and environment
- Veterans and military support

Although these ERG examples highlight their primary members and missions, most organizations invite employees from all backgrounds to join. Catalyst recommends this approach to foster allyship, raise awareness, build connections, and promote a culture of inclusion.

How ERGs benefit organizations

Organizations can benefit from ERG programs and activities in many ways depending on the mission, scope, and goals of the ERG.

Supporting inclusive strategies

In many companies and firms, ERGs are a critical element in creating a culture of inclusion and a workplace that supports diversity of background, thought, and perspective. For example, ERGs can:

- Provide organizational leaders assessing inclusive strategies with valuable advice on the issues, opportunities, and challenges related to their constituencies.
- Supply a constructive forum for feedback on which programs work and which do not.
- Provide organizations with a mechanism for recruiting, retaining, and developing a pool of employees who can support broad organizational goals.

Developing leaders

Many organizations that invest in their ERGs use them as a vehicle for leadership development. They may explicitly ask their ERGs to foster leadership on behalf of the organization, and the ERGs may do so by providing career seminars, skill-building activities, or mentoring programs. At **Boston Scientific**, employees of all levels serve as ERG leaders. Leaders benefit not only by advancing the interests of their ERGs, but also from the opportunity to have regular meetings with Executive Committee sponsors, who provide strategic partnership and guidance.¹

Engaging employees

ERG programs and activities can help integrate different business initiatives across all levels and locations. They offer employees community, camaraderie, and connections to the organization, giving them a sense of belonging. ERGs also introduce new and current employees to the organizational culture and help to build and maintain employee engagement and satisfaction.

For many organizations, ERGs are a cornerstone to advancing cultural change that benefits all employees, including by:

- Advancing organizational goals for inclusion and increasing awareness and understanding of cultural issues and opportunities.
- Developing a culture of “allies” that encourages people of all backgrounds to attend events, seminars, and workshops.
- Contributing to the organization's success by providing more development opportunities for employees.

In addition, ERGs provide their members with professional and personal growth opportunities through access to skill-building and educational trainings, seminars, networking events, and other activities. ERGs create an environment for making informal connections and developing relationships. They often help members acquire skills that help them better perform their jobs and more effectively manage their careers.

- At **UPMC**, the NIC (Nursing Inclusion Council) worked with UPMC leadership to build opportunities for nurses to implement a nursing scholarship.²
- At **The Hartford**, a program called PODERLift, created by the Black Insurance Professionals Network (BIPN) and Hispanic Leadership Network (HLN) ERGs, supports and enables the advancement of employees by providing mentorship and a customized career development plan. This program has been so successful that it is being replicated by other ERGs.³

Often, ERGs connect similar employees spread across the organization. ERG members can also benefit from:

- Finding and becoming mentors.
- Showcasing their work and skills to become known within the organization.
- Developing knowledge and skills.
- Gaining product and business development experience.
- Building relationships across business areas and geographies.
- Channeling their voices to advocate for culture change.

Developing customers and clients

Many organizations view ERG members as indispensable organizational ambassadors who have valuable information about the needs and experiences of important constituents and markets. ERGs provide insights on burgeoning markets, product development and design, marketing strategies, and the importance of mirroring the customer and client base.

- **SephoraPrism**, which focuses on the LGBTQ+ community and allies, collaborated with the IT team to ensure that employees' preferred names are displayed consistently across all platforms and that pronouns are on everyone's badges, which makes employees feel safer and creates a greater sense of belonging. Pronouns are also displayed on employee store badges, even though it's still unusual among retailers to include pronouns on name tags in retail stores.⁴

In addition, ERGs can host client meetings, connect with targeted consumers, and participate in local professional associations and events to enhance organizational visibility in various markets and develop strategic relationships with customers, clients, and suppliers.

Expanding cross-cultural and global understanding

Many organizations recognize that different countries have unique employee populations, and that ERGs in global organizations play an essential role in connecting employees across regions.

- **RBC** has 41 ERGs around the world, which operate both as regional and platform-specific groups.⁵
- **Boston Scientific** encourages employees to create chapters of global ERGs in local regions.⁶
- At **Medtronic**, grass roots ERGs called “Hubs” focus on advancing ethnically diverse women in the United States and worldwide by working with local leadership and refining their strategies to align with larger business goals. Hubs then come together at a signature event to connect, celebrate, and share successes.⁷

Local chapters of national ERGs also provide visiting senior leaders with the opportunity to meet employees and managers in group settings to discuss business improvement ideas, development opportunities, and challenges associated with integrating corporate policy within the local context. These exchanges provide not only valuable learning opportunities for senior leaders and local staff, but also a chance for emerging talent to gain visibility.

Reaching out to the community

Many organizations leverage ERGs to link employees to their communities and build reputational capital in the marketplace. This outreach contributes to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and favorably impacts the perception of the employer.

- The Forever Proud Employee Resource Group at **TD** spearheads the bank’s Pride celebrations around the world, showing visible support to both employees and communities where the bank operates.⁸
- **Sephora’s** Green Team organizes beach and park clean-ups.⁹

Explore the guide

- Developing an ERG
- Building and growing ERG membership
- Establishing ERG governance and structure
- Cultivating ERG support and collaboration
- ERG programming and initiatives
- Common ERG challenges and solutions
- ERG communications
- Measuring ERG success

1. [*Boston Scientific: Accelerating progress for women by creating equal opportunities for growth: Practices.*](#) (2022). Catalyst.
2. [*UPMC: Care and culture starts and ends with people: Executive workforce demographics: Practices.*](#) (2023). Catalyst.
3. [*The Hartford: A deliberate and courageous transformation: Practices.*](#) (2023). Catalyst.
4. [*Sephora: DE&I heart journey: Practices.*](#) (2024). Catalyst.
5. [*RBC: Speak up for inclusion: Practices.*](#) (2021). Catalyst.
6. [*Boston Scientific: Accelerating progress for women by creating equal opportunities for growth: Practices.*](#) (2022). Catalyst.
7. *Medtronic: Igniting women to lead through the Medtronic women's network.* (2020). Catalyst.
8. [*TD: Forever proud. Forever progressing.: Practices.*](#) (2023). Catalyst.
9. [*Sephora: DE&I heart journey: Practices.*](#) (2024). Catalyst.

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