# Top tips for starting an Employee Resource Network



Created by Mike Sealy -

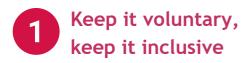Vice President, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Informa Markets

## What is an Employee Resource Network?

Employee resource groups (ERGs) can play an important role in your strategy to support underrepresented people within your organisation, creating an avenue for allies to join this journey and use their privilege for good. ERGs are a functional, strategic tool for advancing diversity initiatives, including the recruitment and retention of talent. ERGs are here to celebrate, bring together and highlight employees from all different backgrounds and engage allies in this journey.

They will typically focus on women, people of colour, the LGBTQIA+ community, disabled people, neurodiverse people, those with caring responsibilities, different religious communities and so on. It is important to create the appropriate ERGs that help to meet the inclusive needs of your own organisation.

# 10 tips for starting an ERG

### 1  Keep it voluntary, keep it inclusive

Employee resource groups should be open to anyone who wants to join, regardless of their identity or background. This way, you can foster a culture of inclusion and respect, and avoid creating silos or cliques within the organisation.

### 2  Let members shape the group

Employee resource groups should be driven by the interests and needs of their members, not by the management or the HR department. Members should have a say in setting the goals, objectives, and activities of the group, and be empowered to take ownership and leadership roles.

### 3  Give autonomy

You've appointed Leads. Now what? Give them autonomy to deliver. A clear structure of the type of initiatives, communications, events and reporting must be provided to ensure a consistent and measurable approach. Be clear on what the budget is and how it is split up across the year. There must be a budget. Partnerships and events cost money to run - be ready to invest from the beginning, otherwise you're just tokenising efforts.
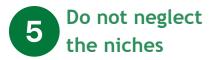
## 4 Start small and scale up

Employee resource groups do not need to have a large membership or a big budget to be effective. You can start with a few founding members who share a common vision and passion, and then gradually expand your reach and impact by inviting more people, organising events, and collaborating with other groups.

## 5 Do not neglect the niches

Employee resource groups should not only focus on the broad categories of diversity, such as gender, race, or sexual orientation, but also on the specific issues and challenges that affect different subgroups within those categories.

## 6 Provide professional development

Employee resource groups should not only be a space for socialising and networking, but also for learning and growing. You can offer opportunities for members to develop their skills, knowledge, and career prospects by providing mentoring, coaching, training, or sponsorship programs.

## 7 Involve the rest of the organisation

Employee resource groups should not operate in isolation, but rather in alignment with the overall diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy of the organisation. You can involve the rest of the organisation by seeking support and guidance from senior leaders, HR professionals, or diversity officers; by communicating your goals and achievements to other employees; and by partnering with other groups or departments on joint initiatives.

## 8 Promote ERGs as safe spaces

These groups are crucial to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within a company because they create a safe space for employees where they can share their experiences, challenges and perspectives in confidence. However, ERG leadership should consider allocating monthly or quarterly meetings to include allies. Crucially, when allies are included in these ERGs, there should be clear participation guidelines, so they know what is expected of them.

## 9 Give ERG leads time to participate

Employees have days jobs to fulfil, participating in an ERG is voluntary. The business must allow a suitable amount of time each month for networking engagement and activities.

## 10 ERGs are not part of HR

The burden of solving diversity, equity & inclusion issues or driving strategy should not be placed on ERGs. Leadership needs to be clear about their commitment to culture change and they should be accountable to developing and implementing the diversity, equity & inclusion strategy. ERGs can be used to obtain valuable feedback on employee sentiment which may help to define strategic goals and actions to improve overall culture and inclusion.