Toolkit for Establishing Employee Resource Groups
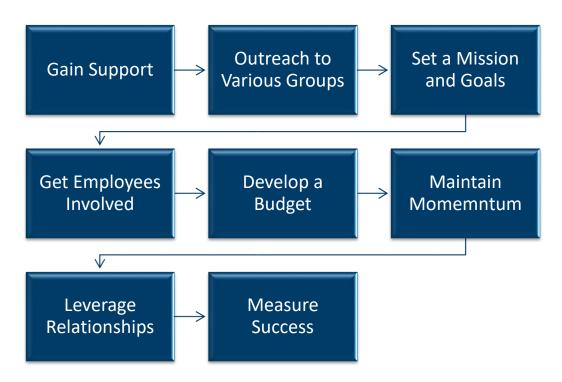
Table of Contents

Toolkit for Establishing Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Getting Started

Congratulations on getting your Employee Resource Group started! Below you will find some suggested steps to ensure that you can get your group up and running. This toolkit serves only as a guide and you may find other methods that enable your group to grow and thrive. We encourage you to pursue what makes best sense for your ERG, so long as the ERGs operation falls within the parameters of the Minnesota State ERG Guidelines. The following steps included in the graphic below are elaborated on in the subsequent contents of this toolkit.

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Gain Support  →  Outreach to      →  Set a Mission
                 Various Groups       and Goals
                                          ↓
Get Employees →  Develop a        →  Maintain
Involved         Budget               Momemntum
                                          ↓
Leverage      →  Measure
Relationships    Success
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Step 1: Gaining Support

As a Chair or a Champion of an ERG, you will want to actively work to identify an executive sponsor and other key leaders who will demonstrate commitment and support for the ERG. Strong executive sponsors will make the success of the ERG a priority and personal responsibility, without taking away autonomy of the group. In choosing an executive sponsor, it's important to find someone who is willing to put their own privilege and access to resources on the line for the ERG and is personally committed to the success of the group.

Having strong leadership commitment and support for the ERG will ensure that employees feel safe to participate and also allow leaders the opportunity to receive recommendations which can improve employee outcomes. The best groups are those that are organic and employee-driven. Additional information on the roles within the ERG can be found within the Minnesota State ERG Guidelines.

Step 2: Outreach and Create Partnerships

Newly established ERGs should network and partner with other groups and key Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion specialists that are already in place across various campuses. These can include specific affinity groups, multicultural centers, internal diversity groups, or your campus Office of Equity and Inclusion. Request permission from group/organization leaders to attend meetings or meet with the group leads to share your ideas, gain feedback, and begin to form partnerships/relationships.

Things to find out:

- ✓ When was their group started?
- ✓ What is their purpose/mission?
- ✓ Who is their audience?
- ✓ How do they conduct outreach?
- ✓ What obstacles, advice, or lessons learned can they share?
- ✓ Ways you can work together.

Step 3: Set a Mission and Goals

Before you begin meeting with group participants regularly, you will want to spend time developing some draft goals and a mission statement for your ERG. Once you begin meeting with your ERG, allow participants the opportunity to provide inputs, feedback, and recommendations for your ERG's goals and mission statement. The mission and goals should align or support the Minnesota State Office of Equity and Inclusion's vision and strategic goals, which can be found in the ERG Guidelines or on the OEI website.

A few guiding questions which can help when establishing the mission and goals include:

- ✓ What do the members value in the group?
- ✓ How does this ERG differ from other campus groups?
- ✓ What do you hope to accomplish or change?
- ✓ What steps does the ERG need to take to achieve its mission?
- ✓ Are your goals "S.M.A.R.T."?
- ✓ What resources will you need to accomplish your goals or mission?
- ✓ Do your goals and objectives line up with those of the Minnesota State Office of Equity and Inclusion?
- ✓ Who will take the lead on pursuing each goal?
- ✓ What are the short-term versus long-term goals?

Step 4: Getting Employees Involved

ERG leaders should develop a plan and work with their team and other group members to develop marketing and outreach strategies in order to promote and encourage participation.

Sample Outreach Strategies:

- ✓ Campus Newsletters
- ✓ Inclusion of materials in employee orientation / onboarding
- ✓ Email Blasts
- ✓ Networking with other administrators, faculty, and staff
- ✓ Asking participants to share within their respective networks
- ✓ Hanging flyers on campus poster boards
- ✓ Hosting events
- ✓ Creating Social Media pages

Step 5: Develop a Budget and Securing Funding

Once your group has an agreed upon mission and set of goals, you will want to spend time determining what types of resources you will need to achieve your mission and goals. If there are items which will require financing to support their implementation/execution, prepare a budget which highlights the financial support that you believe your ERG will require.

The Office of Equity and Inclusion will have limited funding available for use by the various system-wide ERGs. OEI will prioritize requests for financial support based on demonstrated need, projected impact, and will work to ensure funds are distributed equitably. Budget forecasts to support the next Fiscal Year (FY) are due to OEI no later than March 31st each year. For example, budget forecasts to support FY20 (Jul 2019 – Jun 2020) are due no later than March 31st, 2019. Requests for funding and budget forecasts can be submitted via email to OEI@minnstate.edu, and cc tarrence.robertson@minnstate.edu.

Once you have a budget established, we encourage your ERG to brainstorm alternative forms of funding to support your ERG activities and efforts. Some sample ideas for funding methods are included below.

Sample alternative funding methods:
- ✓ Grants
- ✓ Partnering with other entities or ERGs to co-sponsor your event or initiative
- ✓ Charging registration fees for events
- ✓ Asking for voluntary ERG membership fees or annual dues
- ✓ Working with community partners to secure sponsorships

Step 6: Holding Meetings and Maintaining Momentum

Meeting design, structure, and frequency should be decided collaboratively with inputs from your ERG participants. A few suggested items to consider for establishing your ERG meeting design include:

- ✓ Determining the dates, time, frequency, and length of meetings
- ✓ Determining the venue or platform (if virtual, which software will you use?)
- ✓ Consider specific roles for participants
- ✓ Is there a specific agenda you want to follow?

Tips for hosting your first few ERG meetings:

When you decide to convene your first ERG meetings, consider conducting some "icebreakers" or activities for participants to get to know one another. You can also facilitate team building exercises to begin establishing rapport and trust among members of the group. An easy way to find some examples is to search the internet for different exercises and activities. Finally, during the first meeting you will want to discuss what some of the roles are for the ERG and see if anyone is interested in serving in a leadership capacity.

Once your group is established and meeting frequently, you will want to ensure you can maintain interest and momentum. This responsibility ultimately resides with the entire group, including the Champion and Executive Sponsor. The following tips may be used to maximize participation and maintain momentum:

- ✓ Create a positive, inclusive, welcoming, and safe space
- ✓ Adhere to the groups objectives, mission, and guidelines
- ✓ Continue outreach and networking to increase participation
- ✓ Create visibility through hosting or participating in events
- ✓ Host professional development seminars for your participants
- ✓ Create mentoring programs and peer-support systems
- ✓ Hold workshops on topics of interest and engage subject matter experts for support
  - o Lunch and Learns
  - o Recognition / celebration of cultural, historic, or relevant days/months
- ✓ Develop a communication plan and establish a frequency for engaging with members and other audiences between meetings
  - o Updates
  - o Opportunities
- ✓ Host "member-drives" and encourage participants to bring in their colleagues
- ✓ Use social media to promote your group and events

Step 7: Leverage Relationships

As mentioned previously, the best ERGs are those that are organic and employee-driven. Your group is centered on internal networks that represent a community of employees, sharing different characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, race, culture, ability status, and so on. Leveraging your relationships and other networks is a great way to increase visibility for your group and to increase your group's impact.

A few ways to leverage relationships, both internally and externally include:
- ✓ Developing partnerships with other ERGs or campus groups
- ✓ Maintaining open communication with members of other groups
- ✓ Sharing resources, information, and best practices
- ✓ Establishing partnerships with community leaders or other business leaders
- ✓ Disseminating announcements, ERG news, and upcoming events
- ✓ Collaborating on professional and/or community events and activities

Step 8: Measuring Success

To measure success, you will need to ensure that your group has established clear (S.M.A.R.T.) goals as well as determined what success means for each goal. Your goals will drive the function of your group and establish a clear path to meeting the needs of participants.

The ERG's goals and success criteria should be easy to understand, support your mission, and be measurable. A few examples of different success criteria may include:

- ✓ Hosting one annual professional development event
- ✓ Recruiting 15 new employees per year to join the group
- ✓ Publishing a quarterly newsletter
- ✓ Conducting outreach to at least one community organization/partner per year

Make It Your Own

Your ERGs can take on any number of different priorities for its participants. It is truly up to the ERG Chairs/Champions and members to drive your ERG's strategy and determine what you want to get out of the group. Make it your own! The Office of Equity and Inclusion is available for support or guidance at any time.