

## **Checklist: Empowering Employee Resource Groups**

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In a [15-minute podcast](#) with guest Loule Gebremedhin — the Associate Director of Engagement, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Disability Rights California — we discussed the importance of employee resource groups. ERGs are employee-led groups of like identities (and often allies) that play several roles within the organization.

This checklist covers the roles that ERGs play, how your organization can empower ERGs, and challenges that organizations may face in empowering their ERGs. It also summarizes valuable advice from Loule on what organizations can do to advance their DEI journey.

### **1. Roles that ERGs Play in the Organization**

ERGs often wear many hats. They serve as safe spaces for employees who identify and, for some ERGs, allies. They also serve as strategic partners with the organization to move the DEI work forward. Loule discussed the full range of roles that ERGs can play as they:

- Promote DEI throughout the organization
- Foster a safe space to help employees bring their authentic selves to work
- Educate staff on culturally relevant topics
- Issue newsletters with historical facts about their groups
- Share stories about their lived experience
- Serve as a strategic partner with the business by engaging in various ways throughout the company, such as collaborating on policy changes to improve workplace practices
- Discuss issues of intersectionality
- Highlight heritage months

## **2. Ways that Your Organization Can Empower ERGs**

With the many roles that ERGs can play, they need organizational support so that the people involved feel empowered to make an impact. Here are a few ways to support ERGs:

- Provide the budget and resources to carry out activities and promote their groups.
- Share information about what has worked for other ERGs.
- Connect them with an advisor/executive sponsor
- Train them on leadership development, how to manage a budget, process expenditure

## **3. Overcoming Challenges**

Organizations may also face challenges in leveraging ERGs as strategic partners – particularly when it comes to improving processes and procedures for better employee experiences. Some of the challenges include:

- Knowing how to support ERG leaders' growth as leaders in the organization
- Understanding how to reward ERG leadership (either monetarily or within the performance management process)
- Rallying organizational leadership to be invested in ERGs and ERG programs
- Creating structure for ERG administration
- Managing burnout for ERG leaders
- Securing, allocating, and tracking budgets for ERG programs
- Incorporating feedback from the ERGs on organizational practices

The biggest challenge in this area is often managing expectations from ERGs around changes to processes and procedures – and communicating them. It's essential to use the feedback you receive, so managing how to respond is important. We suggest committing to have a dialogue of communication where leadership is an invested partner.

#### **4. Include ERGs as Strategic DEI Partners**

For organizations that want to take the next step in their DEI journey, ERGs can be an important partner in involving the whole organization in DEI efforts. When DEI initiatives – including ERG support – is siloed in HR or leadership, they tend to falter. As you carve your DEI action plans, involve:

- The ERGs as strategic partners
- The employees that are doing the work
- A DEI Committee

These perspectives are essential to understand and incorporate because they provide valuable insight into the needs of your employee base and the perspectives of those who are contributing to creating a more inclusive environment.