

Guide

How ERGs are evolving to extend their reach and effectiveness

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The role of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) is changing to become more intersectional and collaborative—but their necessity is more crucial than ever. From a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) perspective, ERGs are essential to maintaining employee well-being as they offer safe spaces that build a sense of belonging and allow employees and leaders to come together to problem-solve in the moment. This allows for more underrepresented voices to be given a seat at decision-making tables.

Enhancing ERG collaboration is an important step in the new hybrid and remote workplace. Intersectionality between groups—such as a mental health/wellness ERG collaborating with a Black employee ERG to discuss the mental toll the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately had on Black communities—is essential. Through these partnerships, ERGs can have a wider reach within the company to promote events and reach new members.

A few companies are choosing to move away from ERGs in an effort to include those who are uncomfortable with DEI efforts (see Seramount's [From Pledge to Progress: Corporate America One Year After George Floyd's Death](#) report for more details). Organizations may be consciously or unconsciously (by limiting funding or executive engagement to their ERGs, as an example) doing this—taking this step is detrimental to the employees who have been historically excluded in their workplaces. To integrate these perspectives into DEI planning, utilize [Employee Voice Sessions](#) rather than further limit underrepresented groups.

If a company is at the point where there are no underrepresented demographics of workers (which occurs when a company's internal demographics match country demographics, such as having 18.5 percent of a company's employees identify as Latine, which is a [direct reflection of how many citizens in the United States identify as Latine](#)), then it may seem as though ERGs are no longer necessary. However, there is always space for a "yes, and" mentality. It would be more beneficial for companies like this to focus on improving intersectionality and collaboration between ERGs rather than trying to move away from the ERG model.

To achieve greater collaboration, there are a few tactics companies are using:

- **Alliance councils** where ERG leaders of specific types of demographics, such as all ERG leaders of employee of color groups, meet to discuss needs of each community, govern their ERGs together, and raise concerns to needed leadership members as a group.
- **Inclusion or accountability pods/councils** where a more diverse group of leaders—usually former ERG leaders and executives—meet to discuss the DEI needs of the organization. In this model, a handful of companies are eliminating ERGs altogether, which may create a deficit in the sense of belonging for some employees and could negatively impact employee productiveness and retention rates.
- **Events** that bring all company ERGs together to network, such as an annual conference or quarterly networking sessions. These events can focus on specific topics, provide space for ERG members to talk with leadership, and offer fireside chats to create more relaxed dialogue for hard issues.

Diversity Best Practices at Seramount recommends companies take a mixed-methods approach when considering the evolution of their ERGs. By keeping ERGs and maintaining their beneficial qualities for employees and business needs (solving business issues such as recruitment or talent development needs or enhancing client engagements) and adding alliance councils or inclusion pods/councils to the mix, there is potential for more ERG collaboration both with other ERGs and with senior leadership. This creates

stronger programming, greater alignment with business goals, and better overall connectedness across the organization.

ALLIANCE COUNCILS

If a company has attained a consistent level of collaboration and integration between ERGs, which, as an example, can be measured by tracking co-hosted events and communications between ERG leaders, councils may be the next step to further solidify the communities that have been built between the ERGs. Alliance councils are groups of ERG leaders that meet regularly to discuss points of intersectionality. They are essentially an additional governance step for the ERG structure and oversee their ERGs together in order to align priorities and programming.

An example:

Intel's Cross-Faith ERG Leaders Alliance

- This alliance council is composed of seven belief-based ERGs (Atheist/Agnostic, Baha'i, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh) and started in late 2019, just before the COVID-19 pandemic began.
- Its goal has been to “unite while celebrating diversity.” The alliance holds up differences as a means to understand and support one another and work together in a manner that showcases each member’s talents and interests.
- The group plans to do a “world tour” within Intel, visiting all of their 30+ sites globally, through virtual call-in meetings. They will have a panel of leaders from the different faith ERGs talk about a specific topical area.

INCLUSION/ACCOUNTABILITY COUNCILS/POD

Some companies have taken a step away from ERGs and have instead created inclusion or accountability councils. In models like this, instead of having employee communities that offer a broader engagement space for all employees to come together based on similar background and interests, groups of leaders in the company gather regardless of background and discuss inclusion needs for the company. Creating this system allows every demographic to be represented to discuss the needs of all employees rather than having segmented conversations that may or may not be brought to a more diverse committee. However, this model can remove the community aspect of ERGs and could disenfranchise employees who are not involved. Moving to only inclusion and accountability councils can undermine a company’s progress in DEI efforts as it removes easily accessible communities that build belonging, opportunities for professional development, and visibility for employees with senior leadership.

An example of this system:

Deloitte

- In 2017, Deloitte announced it would phase out its ERGs, including its longest-standing ERG of 24 years, the Women’s Initiative Network (WIN) and its newer group Globe (LGBTQ+ employees). In their place, inclusion councils were formed, and all employees were welcome to participate.
- This move was made for two reasons: White men in the company felt they were not part of the inclusion conversation and did not know their role in advancing DEI efforts. The other is that based on an internal survey, ERGs were more associated with Baby Boomers and Generation X rather than Millennials, with the latter preferring total inclusion movements instead.
- Updates on this system are not available via [Deloitte’s DEI website](#). However, on the front page, the culture of the company states that it encourages all employees to behave inclusively in their everyday interactions, and Deloitte has highlighted [six inclusive leadership behaviors](#) meant to empower everyone: commitment, courage, curiosity, collaboration, cultural intelligence, and cognizance of bias.

Other companies are taking a mixed approach in which they are keeping their ERG communities in order to ensure employees continue to have spaces to go and discuss their needs, both professional and personal, but adding inclusion councils, where groups of ERG leaders and executives come together to discuss any issues that may have been brought up in an ERG meeting and to plan future DEI goals.

Examples:

Deluxe Media

- Deluxe founded its Employee Resource Committee and established four ERGs in 2019, adding four more ERGs in 2020. The committee includes the leaders of all eight ERGs and executive sponsors.
- Their ERGs include Parents, Emerging Leaders, Hispanic, AVID, African American, Women, Pride+, and Veterans.

Adidas's Global Committee to Accelerate Inclusion and Equality and United Against Racism Accountability Councils

- The Global Committee to Accelerate Inclusion and Equality is comprised of a diverse group of leaders who provide regular updates to the Board and aim to create transparency for all employees via internal communications. This committee is set to evolve into the Global DEI Council, which will bring together functional leaders responsible for strategic initiatives focused on DEI in Adidas's workforce, workplace, and marketplace.
- The United Against Racism Accountability Councils in the United States and Canada provide oversight and acceleration for all company targets, policies, and commitments.
- These groups both work alongside the company's ERGs, which include groups for women, LGBTQ+, experienced generations, and North American people of color.

EVENTS TO IMPROVE ERG COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

To create opportunities for ERGs to network and build collaborations, some companies hold events in which all ERG leaders and members have the opportunity to engage. These events can include breakout sessions for various issues or open-dialogue rooms where attendees can voice their needs and questions to a panel. Creating these spaces can be a great way for ERGs to find points of intersectionality that can lead to greater intentionality around programming and interactions with the broader company community. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of these events have been transitioned to virtual platforms, which makes them more accessible and allows employees who may not be able to attend to watch recordings of sessions and weigh in later.

Examples:

AT&T Employee Resource Group National ERG Conference

- **AT&T has 13 ERGs:** Ability, AT&T Veterans, FACES, Faith@Work, HACEMOS, ICAE, InspirASIAN, LEAGUE at AT&T, OASIS, oxyGEN, Professionals 50 Forward, The NETwork, and Women of AT&T
- The annual conference brings these ERGs together, averaging about 1,500 employee attendees, and offers leadership workshops, fireside chats, networking with employees from across the country, and direct interaction with company leaders.
- At this event, ERGs are recognized for their work in furthering the mission of each ERG. Awards include cash prizes that go toward funding events and various volunteer opportunities throughout the year.

Bank of America, AbbVie, FINRA, and a collaboration between Fifth Third Bank, Ernst & Young LLP, and Procter & Gamble

- Bank of America had four ERGs join together to host multicultural events celebrating Native American Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, African American culture, and Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.
- AbbVie saw its veterans, Latine, and Black employee groups team up on a community effort to provide

bicycles, helmets, and bike locks to local veterans who needed transportation.

- FINRA hosted a panel discussion on financial literacy as a collaboration between the Latino, Asian, and African American ERGs.
- Fifth Third Bank's, Ernst & Young's, and Procter & Gamble's ERGs teamed up to collaborate on how to attract diverse talent to Cincinnati, where they all have offices.