



GUIDE

# **Four Ways to Pivot Hybrid and Remote Employee Resource Groups**

March 2022

# Key Takeaways

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▶ **To best support your company's ERGs in a fully or partially virtual workplace, here are four things you can do:**

1. **Create spaces for ERG collaboration.** These can include hosting intersectional events or creating alliance councils that allow ERG leaders to easily connect and brainstorm with other ERG leaders and executive sponsors. (To find out more, see: [How ERGs Are Evolving to Extend Their Reach and Effectiveness](#))
2. **Encourage fewer but more intentional events.** Having one large event co-hosted by two or more ERGs can provide greater reach within the company, allowing it to be more impactful. Have options for follow-up conversations for those who couldn't attend the main event to have an opportunity to engage with the larger group. This can include video platforms or through internal communication hubs.
3. **Be sure the technology available to ERGs is sufficient for larger audiences** (such as using Webex or Zoom). This will allow easier planning for collaborative events and fewer technology issues experienced by attendees, especially if the platform is the same one used for daily meetings.
4. **Consider expanding globally so more employees have the benefits of ERG communities.** This can mean offering virtual events to a larger employee population or having established ERGs collaborate with international employees to create chapters in other countries.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) create opportunities for companies to engage with their employees in a multitude of ways from recruitment, retention, and advancement to helping with business goals. With the push into a virtual workplace, many companies have felt challenged on how to pivot, realign, and promote their ERGs to ensure their positive impacts continue. The most recent [Diversity Best Practice Member Circle: Redefining ERG Engagement in a Hybrid Work Environment](#) – an interactive discussion with DEI practitioners at every level – focused on transitioning ERGs to a hybrid or fully remote workplace. Attendees highlighted employee burnout and mental health, workload, and competing work/life time-constraints as the greatest challenges to engagement. These challenges can stem from lack of ERG participation in relevant business planning (such as, what employees need while working from home, information that could be easily collected from ERG membership), “Zoom fatigue,” and poor collaboration between ERGs.

ERGs can be a [company's secret weapon](#) if utilized appropriately – especially in a virtual setting. This guide will demonstrate tactics companies have already incorporated to solidify employee engagement, improve virtual culture, and ensure employee communities continue to thrive in a hybrid and remote workplace.

## Improving Engagement

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Engagement has been one of the most challenging aspects for some companies in moving to a virtual workplace. In the recent Member Circle, pre-pandemic employee engagement with ERGs was rated only slightly higher on average compared to current engagement. How do companies keep their workers in tune with company culture, when managers and coworkers are sometimes hundreds of miles away, especially

with events that are usually optional? One way is by encouraging ERGs to be more intentional with events and collaborate with other ERGs that may have intersectional interests. Bringing ERGs together to co-host allows for broader marketing of the events, creates conversations across a wider base allowing for more in-depth ideation, and creates opportunities for networking.

Recording events is also a helpful tactic to ensure work priorities do not prohibit employees from attending. Recordings can be shared widely via a company newsletter or internal communication platforms, such as on Slack. Having follow-up conversations may also be beneficial to pull in more employee voices. These conversations can be via the same video platform as the main event, or they can be more informal, including topic-specific threads on internal communication platforms or through coffee chats with small groups.

Creating new opportunities for employees to engage in impactful communities can occur during the transition to a virtual ERG plan. Many companies are looking to expanding their ERG offerings to pull more employees to these communities.

**Some examples of ERGs that may not be as common are:**

- Inter-faith
- Parents and Caregivers
- Veteran
- Employees with Disabilities
- Intergenerational
- Sustainability

Creating more meaningful connections between business planning and ERGs has also served as a way to improve virtual engagement. Given the impact of the pandemic on all paths of life – from healthcare to caregiving to personal mental health needs – it is a valuable tool for planning structures to have access to more voices. Taking this step can aid in retention as [employees that feel more valued and heard in their companies are more likely to stay](#) and can cause employees to take on career development opportunities within their current companies rather than externally because of the confidence they have in the company.

## Is Technology the Missing Link?

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While remote or hybrid work may be the new norm of working, having employees in various parts of the world is nothing new. Ensuring that ERGs have access to tried-and-true platforms to host events, schedule meetings, and have a variety of capabilities to promote attention and engagement (such as the ability to create breakout rooms for smaller discussions) is important in mitigating challenges that larger, co-hosted events can cause. When considering what technology supports ERGs may benefit from, consider the following questions:

Does the company have...

- Access to a platform that can manage, plan, and track projects (such as Asana or Basecamp)?
- Access to document storage, easy file sharing, and simple document collaboration (such as Google Drive or Box)?
- Access to virtual meeting platforms that offer tools to maximize engagement (such as Zoom or WebEx)?

- Access to scheduling platforms that make it easy to make sense of many calendars (such as Doodle or Calendly)?

If companies can answer yes to these questions, ERGs should have all the technology needed to advance their platforms and make the most out of their collaborative events. Consideration should be made, however, if any one of these questions results in an unknown answer – having these tools can make or break the success of an engaging, company-wide conversation, especially when the topic may be a more difficult undertaking.

## Embracing the Global Digital Worker with ERGs

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With the addition of better technology during the pandemic, companies have been able to offer ERG events to a larger employee audience, including those who may work internationally. With over [70 percent of workers globally wanting to keep flexible remote work options](#), how can employers ensure that they are still actively involved in corporate activities?

Having the ability to expand the reach of ERGs is important to building a global community. With [Gen Z employees seeing themselves more as global citizens](#) than any previous generation, this can be an important company culture addition for the success of newer and future employees. Now is the time to embrace the term “digital worker” rather than “remote worker” – having the option to be virtual can open doors for better communication and collaboration, not only across departments, but across cultures.

Global ERGs gain traction, most often focused on gender issues. These groups can better manage cultural education needs, from tackling language barriers and actions that may reveal ethnocentrism to unconscious biases and stereotyping. These ERGs can create formal programs where individual chapters educate other chapters about their regional cultural do’s and don’ts, form development opportunities for underrepresented talent in the company, and find innovative ways for the company to connect with local communities and suppliers.

### Case Study: The Estée Lauder Company



Winner of the 2021 Special Award for Social Justice, The Estée Lauder Company’s Network of Black Leaders and Executives (NOBLE) ERG hosted a town hall as a direct response to the unjust killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, only months after the company shifted to a virtual workforce because of the pandemic. What was expected to be no more than a 600-employee turnout grew into a forum of almost 2,000 employees who joined a candid conversation with NOBLE’s Executive Sponsors. The conversations from the town hall led to a multitude of actions, including NOBLE leadership developing a workplace equity strategy for Black talent that informed the company’s racial equity commitments. NOBLE also partnered with other ERGs in ELC to create the ERG Alliance for Justice, a platform for ERGs to stand in solidarity and promote equity and equality.

The transition to more mainstream virtual working allowed NOBLE to partner with ELC’s Global Talent and Inclusion, Diversity and Equity teams to create the From Every Chair (FEC) Program, a program created as part of the company’s ongoing commitment to ensure Black employees have equal access to leadership training and mentorship programs with senior executives. The program is sponsored by several C-suite executives, including ELC’s CEO, Fabrizio Freda.

ELC has also worked on integrating their ERGs into difficult business needs since the start of the pandemic. The [Families at Work](#) community partnered with the company's return-to-work committee to discuss what supports and resources employees may need throughout their transition to a hybrid work environment and as the company continues to work largely remotely. Through this partnership, the Families at Work ERG, which previously had low-visibility in the company, has been able to branch out and form partnerships with other ERGs, such as the Mental Health and Wellbeing community, to create events that focus on intersectional needs. Integrating an ERG into planning processes like this allows for more employee voices to be heard in important planning and it gives executives more insights into what the groups do, allowing them to have wider networks for outreach purposes.

ELC plans on growing their ERGs globally as the next step, given the immense success they have had with ERGs in the United States having more virtual capabilities. This initiative is driven by their global employees who have recently been able to attend or watch recordings of the U.S. ERG events for the first time given the virtual shift because of the pandemic.

## Case Study: Intel



Winner of the Culture Impact Award for their Cross-Faith ERG, Intel's Cross-Faith and Beliefs ERG Leaders Alliance, composed of seven belief-based ERGs, started just before the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also started just before the global uptick in racial and religious violence occurred, alongside instances of extreme nationalism, that hindered cooperation needed to prevent common challenges. Throughout the pandemic, this group had several virtual events, such as participating in the virtual remembrance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., group virtual prayers, and virtual social gatherings. The alliance plans on doing a "world tour" within Intel, visiting all of their 30+ sites globally, through virtual call-in meetings. This will include have a panel of leaders from the different faith ERGs talk about a specific topic.

The alliance's initiatives have been recognized by the [Religious Freedom & Business Foundation](#), an international organization, as being number one & Business Foundation in partnership with the United Nations Global Compact's Business for Peace Initiative. Leaders of the alliance hope the tour will help employees to realize these faith-based and other ERGs exist and grow the number of employees that are engaged in each of the faith-based ERGs, and all other ERGs among the Fortune 100 for "Religious Equity Diversity and Inclusion." Also, at the kick-off for the Paralympic games in Tokyo, Intel was awarded the 2021 "Global Business and Interfaith Peace Gold Medal for Core Business Award" from the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation in partnership with the [United Nations Global Compact's Business for Peace Initiative](#). Leaders of the alliance hope the tour will help employees to realize these faith-based and other ERGs exist and grow the number of employees that are engaged in each of the faith-based ERGs, and all other ERGs.

## Case Study: Merck & Co., Inc.



Winner of the 2021 Special Award for ERG Collaboration, Merck & Co., Inc.'s League of Employees of African Descent (LEAD) took great strides at the beginning of the pandemic to ensure engagement with employees did not suffer during the pivot to working from home. LEAD is a global EBRG with almost 2,000 members across 13 national and international chapters. Early in the pandemic, LEAD partnered with multiple groups across Merck to foster greater awareness of health disparities with

COVID-19 to highlight the importance of inclusion of people of color in awareness education, prevention, and treatment of the virus. They partnered with the Merck Hispanos Organization and the Merck Native American and Global Indigenous Peoples EBRGs to co-facilitate their programs. One event that discussed the impact of COVID-19 on communities of color garnered over 300 attendees and allowed them to offer other opportunities to make an impact in local communities.

Further, the virtual chapter of LEAD hosted 25 webinars across all of Merck's commercial business. These webinars were created to educate field-based personnel on the impact of social determinants on the health of communities of color, and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on diverse communities. Over 1,200 employees were engaged and all attendees rated the events as very good and productive. These discussions created more than 700 ideas shared by employees regarding the generation of culturally relevant materials for vaccination and disease education.

As a result of the success of these events, Merck's EBRG chapters will move to find more opportunities to support vaccine confidence and efforts of Merck.

## Case Study: Verizon



Winner of the Workforce Impact Award, Verizon's Black Originators, Leaders and Doers (BOLD) ERG recognized that the increased instances of racism, violence, fear, and inequality stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic was taking a toll on employees. In resource, BOLD launched a series of initiatives to support Verizon employees. They facilitated Courageous Conversations and provided an opportunity for all employees, through virtual programming, to join in and observe authentic, educational, and transparent discussions. Additionally, through programs such as BOLD Thinking and the BOLD Learning Path, employees have access to extensive career development tools which aid with career advancement preparation. In 2020, the BOLD Learning Path registrations increased by more than 1,800 employees and over 400 new Verizon employees began following the BOLD Learning Portal.

BOLD also sought out to increase diversity recruitment and spread awareness of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) and talent opportunities at these universities. Through BOLD's inaugural virtual homecoming event, the group members raised awareness about the contributions of HBCUs and the importance of recruiting talent from these institutions. As a result of these efforts, BOLD Homecoming 2020 resulted in nearly 11,000 engagements via virtual events, recruitment, and social interactions.

▶ Does your company have ERGs that deserve to be recognized?

### **Nominate them and their leaders for Seramount's [ERG Impact Awards!](#)**

(Formerly the Above & Beyond Awards.) These awards honor ERGs for the critical contributions they make to drive change in the workplace and broader communities.

If you're interested in finding out more about Diversity Best Practice's Member Circles, please contact [hello@seramount.com](mailto:hello@seramount.com). Check out the next [DBP Member Circle: Self-ID and Workplace Inclusivity](#), being held on June 28, 2022!