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We are pleased to present our fourth CCDI toolkit, *Employee Resource Groups: Toolkit for Diversity and Inclusion Practitioners*, which provides the history and business case for

Employee Resource Groups (“ERGs”), as well as practical suggestions and strategies for implementing and managing Employee Resource Groups in your organization.

So often at the CCDI, we are asked by employers: “what can we do to create a more inclusive environment?”

Certainly we recommend examining your organization to determine what are the major issues or challenges to inclusion. We have already provided resources to accomplish that in our first two toolkits: the toolkit for creating a diversity business case and the toolkit for creating a diversity strategy—both available for free to the public on our website.

Once you have a strategy, operationalizing that strategy involves implementing structures, programs and initiatives to support your strategic goals. Many organizations have found that implementing Employee Resource Groups is a practical way to support your inclusion strategy while providing opportunities for employees to connect.

At our Community of Practice events, we engage participants in brainstorming challenges and identifying practical solutions to overcome resistance or resource issues, operationalize their strategies, and leverage important initiatives like Employee Resource Groups to ensure success. At our December 2014 Community of Practice events, we did just that regarding ERGs. The input of participants at our events was instrumental in the creation of this toolkit.

As in our previous toolkits, we recommend that you customize your verbiage so that it will be meaningful and valid in your organization.

For ease of reference, throughout this report, we will refer to “D&I” – with the understanding that we mean diversity and inclusion or human rights and equity in an organization. If human rights and equity is the more appropriate term in your organization, by all means, use it.

These groups go by different names in different organizations: affinity groups, employee network groups, business resource groups, internal support networks, etc. For ease of reference, throughout this report we’ll refer to all such groups as ERGs.

We hope you enjoy and find value in our fourth Toolkit.

We look forward to bringing you more tools and resources as we move forward with engaging dedicated professionals across Canada in developing the solutions to our biggest inclusion challenges.

Thanks.

Michael Bach, CCDP/AP
Founder and CEO
Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
July 16, 2015.









Private-sector versus public-sector organizations.
Regionally, nationally, or internationally operated or managed organizations.
Rural versus urban locations.
Size of the organization (in terms of population, resources, and critical mass of employees).
Unionized or non-unionized workforces.

The mission and structure of ERGs may be shaped by these parameters.

An organization that exists in multiple small locations could potentially have more difficulty engaging with

their ERG members in contrast to an organization that functions in a single, large location⁶.

As a result, organizations have adapted by allowing ERGs to connect either virtually or in-person. These factors may also impact the frequency of interactions between ERG members, and the types of activities or goals the ERG sets for itself.

In our experience working with dozens of employers at the CCDI, we have seen that ERGs can operate successfully under a number of different models when these circumstances are taken into consideration in the planning, implementation, and management of ERGs.

⁶ Christopher Geren, "Why Employee Resource Groups Need Support," Web Long Post (2015).







Although there are factors that lead to success, there are also factors that create barriers or limitations to the efficacy of Employee Resource Groups. These barriers are primarily financial or operational¹¹.

Many ERGs struggle to obtain or maintain organizational funding (or sufficient funding) to fulfill their goals and missions. Not only does limited financial resources hinder the ability of the ERG to function, it creates a perception that there is less value given to the ERGs' presence. This may result in ERGs having to discuss alternate methods of financing their operations, such as fundraising or membership dues, both of which are controversial practices.

Employees within the ERG may struggle to know exactly what they are allowed to do, and how much autonomy the organization grants the ERG. Alternatively, maintaining engagement from the membership of the ERG can be a struggle, particularly if there is doubt regarding appreciation of the work performed by the ERG from the employer.

: Many organizations have difficulty measuring the outcomes of ERGs and demonstrating their success and value to the organization. This is often because the appropriate resources or mechanisms surrounding measurement tools are not established by the employer or organization.

In addition to the challenges identified above, participants at our COP events were asked to brainstorm "ERG Pain Points". Through this exercise, several groups identified or expanded on a number of the challenges they have faced with regard to implementing, operating, and managing ERGs within their organizations.

It should be noted that inadequate budget was the most common barrier to ERG success identified by our COP event participants.

Executive Level Support—lack of senior leaders' involvement and support.
Resistance from middle management—lack of strong engagement and support from management for employees to lead or participate in ERGs.

Budget—limited or none.
Lack of succession planning for ERG leaders.

Not enough recognition of ERG leaders' contributions.

ERG leaders' contributions not connected to performance management/performanceT.-9(m)4(ited)-4(o)

¹¹ "A Toolkit for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Employee Resource Groups," *Employer Assistance and Resource Network* (2011): 3, http://asklearn.org/docs/erg_toolkit.pdf.



business support and developmental component.

No clarity around business case for ERGs: lack of communication around why ERGs are important; lack of linkage to the organization's priorities such as talent, business development, etc.

Resistance to changing the conversation from: 'ERGs take time from "real job"' to 'ERGs and ERG leaders are going above and beyond to contribute to strategic organizational priorities.'

Lack of knowledge about purpose and importance of engagement.

Lack of understanding of concept and vision of ERGs.

ERG leadership fatigue—some ERG leaders get burned out.

Challenges attracting, engaging, and retaining ERG members.

Pushback from members because of time commitment and effort required.

Lack of recognition of contributions of ERG leaders and members.

For long-established ERGs, challenges with innovating and providing new experiences and opportunities. (i.e., not the same potluck every time there's a "themed" month.)

Many of these concerns and challenges can be addressed by taking measures to set up ERGs for success. As we have seen, when managed well, ERGs can provide real tangible benefits to the organization and its employees.





Although no formula exists to guarantee success, there are a number of strategies that have been utilized to promote positive outcomes. From the literature¹² and from our experience at the CCDI, along with input from our COP event participants, we offer a number of strategies if you are implementing ERGs for the first time, or wish to formalize their existence, refresh them, or expand them to other groups or other areas of your organization.

1. Employers should establish formal structures, such as guideline documents or policies, which stipulate the procedures for creating, managing, and operating ERGs with the organization.
2. Each ERG should establish goals and missions that direct the agenda and actions of the group. Every ERG should have some goals that align with organizational priorities. It is important to balance social with business goals developed for the ERG.
3. Each ERG should have an Executive Sponsor to provide support for the group and its mission. A best practice is for the Executive Sponsor to be from a different group than the identity of the ERG (i.e., a non-parent as Executive Sponsor to a Working Parents group). This provides opportunities for mutual learning.
4. Organizations should provide financial support to ERGs. Not only will this allow the ERG flexibility to engage with their mission using financial resources, but it also illustrates to the employees that the organization values the work performed by the ERG.
5. Membership in ERGs should be open to all employees regardless of whether they self-identify as a member of the targeted demographic.
6. Depending on size, complexity, or geographic distribution of members, ERGs may be encouraged to utilize co-chairs and/or subcommittees to facilitate the accomplishment of goals. This will engage more employees in the management of the ERG, and protect against employee burnout which may occur when one individual is tasked with all the leadership responsibilities of an ERG.
7. Organizations should support the communication of the existence of the ERGs, and also support the communications by the ERG about its activities to the larger employee base through internal communications methods (e.g., intranet, emails, memos, posters, desk drops, leadership meetings, town hall meetings, etc.)
8. Employers should engage and connect ERGs with their diversity and inclusion, talent management, social responsibility, and community involvement strategies.

When ERGs are authentically developed and given resources to operate and fulfill their mission, employees within the organization will be more likely to engage with the group, to the benefit of all employees and the organization as a whole.

This section lists the some additional great ideas captured during our COP events when participants in multiple cities were asked to brainstorm what "ERGs Should Include" and "Solutions to ERG Pain Points".

¹² "Starting An Employee Resource Group," Pride At Work (2015), <http://prideatwork.ca/get-involved/become-a-workplace-advocate/starting-an-employee-resource-group2/>.



Create and share video recordings of ERG events or interviews featuring ERG leaders, members, or executive sponsors.
Create a mentorship program for ERG members with other areas of the organization.

Use internal networks to arrange meet and greets.
Leverage internal or external social networking technology to share information about upcoming events and initiatives and/or past successes.



