
Five Ways to Increase Member Engagement in ERGs

By: Robin Pedrelli

Employee Resource Groups provide real value to an organization and can have a very significant impact in several different business areas. But, an organization should never lose sight of the original purpose of the ERG – to serve its employees. Above all the ERGs should provide resources to the employees they represent including a rich and inclusive network, access to coaching and networking, and opportunities for career advancement.

In order to successfully engage in member recruitment the ERG must be able to provide and demonstrate its value to its members. It is very important to position the ERGs as a resource to employees and the organization and ERGs must be viewed as a valuable asset to the business. Participation in ERGs needs to be supported and even encouraged by managers and there should be clear connection between ERG membership and career opportunities. A well thought out member engagement strategy can successfully drive member recruitment as well as engagement.

We share five tips for enhancing the effectiveness of your ERG member engagement strategy.

- 1) Gain CEO and executive leadership support – The active and engaged support of senior leadership can be instrumental in your member recruitment and engagement process. Look for creative ways to leverage the support of senior leadership. Of course the first step is to gain buy-in and a commitment to support ERG efforts. The best way to do this is with a well thought out and clearly articulated business case that specifically speaks to the goals and objectives of the organization. Once you've achieved buy-in, it is time to think about how you can use your leaders in the campaign process. CEOs and executive leaders can reinforce your messaging in executive meetings, employee roadshows, and in pre-recorded messages that can be hosted on the company intranet or played during company events and activities. Ensure the messaging is as personal as possible, illustrating a personal commitment to ERGs.
- 2) Leverage champions across the organization and share success stories – While executive level commitment is instrumental we want to stress the fact that champions can come from anywhere in the organization. An obvious place to start is with your ERG executive sponsors and chairs. But the quickest and most effective way to gain wide-spread support will be in securing a vast and diverse group of champions. Look to HR leaders and practitioners, business leaders who have built successful and fruitful relationships with ERGs, and ERG members who can spread the word at the ground level. Whenever possible share success-stories and provide specific examples of how ERGs have contributed to the

success of the business and its members. Consider featuring an ERG spotlight in company newsletters or other regular communication mediums. Publically recognize ERG leaders and members at company events and activities.

- 3) Invest in onboarding middle managers – Dedicate time and resources to gaining the support of middle managers. Managers must recognize the value of ERGs is they are going to support their employees taking time out of their day for ERG related activities. Rely on your champions in the onboarding process. Approach managers with specific ways the ERGs can contribute to their goals and challenges. Be solutions-oriented, particularly when dealing with resistant managers. Look to create pilot programs with managers, where ERG and business partnerships can demonstrate results.
- 4) Deliver on the Member Value Proposition – The ultimate goal is to ensure employees are not just members but actively engaged in the ERG. Each ERG should clearly articulate opportunities for members to develop skills in competencies through traditional training and stretch assignments that will enhance skill and visibility. Provide specific opportunities for members to contribute to the ERG and/or assume leadership roles in the ERG, which develop leadership skills and project management capability.
- 5) Actively recruit members at events and activities – ERGs are well know for providing events and activities that serve as development and networking opportunities for both members and non-members. Do not miss this opportunity to connect with event participants to encourage them to officially join the ERG and/or recruit their services in the planning and execution of a future ERG event or activity. Have a recruitment strategy in place – prior to the event know whom from the attendee list you are going to approach and have specific ideas in mind for how you would like to engage them.

Robin Pedrelli is the co-founder and partner of VisionSpring, Inc. VisionSpring, Inc. is a women owned and operated diversity and inclusion consulting firm offering fully integrated strategy development, workforce planning, training and continuous learning solutions to leverage diversity and inclusion to drive innovation and improved business outcomes. We provide customized strategic solutions that address the specific needs of each client and blend workforce, workplace, marketplace and community related goals.