

Disability-Focused Employee Resource Groups (ERG)

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are organizational structures within individual businesses designed to address the unique needs and issues of a diverse workforce. ERGs are also referred to as Affinity Groups or Business Resource Groups (BRGs). These groups offer employees an opportunity to network, address common issues and concerns, and receive support from those who share similar backgrounds, experiences or interests.

ERGs are typically open to all and are often created for a variety of groups with common interests. Some examples include military veterans, African Americans, Latinos, LGBT individuals, women, and individuals with disabilities. It is important to note that when creating a disability-focused ERG, there are four common types and it is up to the company to decide if it wishes to create individual groups for each.

1. Employees who are born with, or who have acquired, disabilities
2. Maturing employees with age-related disabilities
3. Veterans with service-connected disabilities
4. Employees who have children with disabilities or are caregivers to adults with disabilities

BENEFITS OF CREATING A DISABILITY-FOCUSED ERG

The creation of an ERG:

1. Demonstrates an employer's commitment to a diverse workforce and can position them as an "employer of choice" for employees with disabilities. As such, job candidates with disabilities may feel more comfortable accepting a job offer since they know their needs will be understood. (In the case of federal contractors covered by Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, applicants may also be more likely to self-disclose when invited at the pre-offer stage.)
2. Encourages Self-ID and Self-Disclosure of employees with disabilities.
3. Assists in the recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities.
4. Offers an opportunity for members to serve as mentors.
5. Boosts productivity, loyalty and job satisfaction.
6. Educates all staff on disability-related topics and may advise a company on issues related to workplace supports, such as accommodations, accessible technology, physical accessibility, and how the overall work environment suits employees with disabilities.
7. Provides an opportunity to develop and execute disability etiquette and awareness training for all staff.
8. Improves product/service development and builds a new customer base/revenue stream.

For more information about the National Business & Disability Council (NBDC) at The Viscardi Center, and the benefits of membership, email NBDCinfo@viscardicenter.org or visit NBDC.com.