

# Employee Resource Groups Needs Assessment and Website Review

---





# Table Of Contents

<b>Rationale and Methodology</b>	1
<b>Employee Resource Groups Needs Assessment</b>	
What are ERGs?	2
Organizational Benefits of Employee Resources Groups	2
<b>Methodology – Appreciative Inquiry</b>	
SOAR Analysis	4
Strengths: What can ERGs build on?	4
Opportunities: What are ERGs asking for?	5
Aspirations: What do ERGs care deeply about?	6
Results: How do ERGs know they are succeeding?	6
<b>Recommendations</b>	
Office of the Vice-Principal Culture, Equity, and Inclusion	7
Recognition	7
Professional Development	8
Great Awareness and Support	8
Process	9
Additional Recommendations	10
Matters for Further Exploration	10
<b>Processes and Frameworks</b>	
Proposed ERG Circles of Support	12
Proposed ‘How to Start an ERG’ Process	14
Proposed ERG Operational Framework	16
Proposed ‘How to Join an ERG’ Process	17
<b>Sources and Resources</b>	18

# Rationale and Methodology

This Needs Assessment and Website Review actualizes Action Item 12 in the Area of Retention within the Employment Equity Plan 2023/2024. Leaders from seven existing or emerging ERGs participated. Semi-structured one-to-one discovery discussions using an Appreciative Inquiry SOAR Analysis was used. Thematic analysis using inductive coding in a flat code frame was used to frame analysis and develop recommendations.





# Employee Resource Groups Needs Assessment

## What are ERGs?

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led groups that bring together employees who share an interest in a specific dimension of diversity[1].

**“ Our ERG has been a lifeline to many. ”**

**“ This ERG was the deciding factor of coming to Queen’s. Now that I am here, I need it for my very survival. ”**

In the Queen’s University context, they are also known as Networks and Caucuses. Their primary purpose is to provide groups of employees with an organizationally provisioned yet ‘grassroots’ structure to support their unique needs as it relates to specific, personally identifying characteristics, including visible and non-visible identifies and/or qualities[2]. Equally important is the many benefits they can provide to the organization.

## Organizational Benefits of ERGs

ERGs serve as a resource for its members, foster I-EDIAA (Indigenization-Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Anti-Racism), and can play a critical role in supporting organizational initiatives and goals. Forward-thinking organizations recognize these groups and its’ members as vital and integral interested parties[6], and as such, many key benefits can be attained.



- Increasing employee engagement, retention, and wellness
- Fostering feelings of belonging
- Providing strategic HR and I-EDIAA advice to Senior Leadership
- Supporting more inclusive policies and procedures
- Supporting the recruitment and retention of untapped talent pools
- Expanding leadership talent pipeline
- Supporting the university's connections to the broader community
- Building environmental, social, and governance (in part, previously referred to as corporate social responsibility)
- Building brand and reputation

**“ It is demoralizing to submit our annual ERG Reports to the Provost Office, only not to hear back from them. ”**

If supported properly, ERGs can be powerful drivers of an organization's- and its employees' – success. They are sources of ideas and agents of transformational change.

# Methodology – Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to organizational analysis and learning. It is intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social organizational arrangements and processes.[4]

- Semi-structured one-to-one discovery discussions using an AI SOAR Analysis was used:
  - o Strengths: What can we build on?
  - o Opportunities: What are our interested parties asking for?
  - o Aspirations: What do we care deeply about?
  - o Results: How do we know we are succeeding?



- Discovery discussions were conducted with multiple ERG Leaders from the following groups:
  - Queen’s Women’s Network (QWN)
  - Women in Science at Queen’s (WISQ)
  - Queen’s University Muslim Inclusion Network (QUMIN)
  - Queen’s Association for Queer Employees (QUAQE)
  - Queen’s Black Faculty and Staff Caucus (BFSC)
  - Indigenous Staff and Faculty Network (ISFN)
  - Queen’s Global Connect (QGC)
- Discussions were also conducted with key administrative staff from Human Resources and several administrative staff/managers who have and continue to be allies of ERGs.
- ERG surveys (where available) were also analyzed.
- SOAR thematic analysis using inductive coding in a flat code frame was used to frame analysis and develop recommendations.
- The draft of this document was sent individually to all ERG leaders who participated by fact checking to ensure accuracy.

## SOAR Analysis

### **Strengths: What can ERGs build on?**

- Highly motivated and engaged employees that show up and do the work of inclusivity and belonging with compassion and cultural humility.
- University’s commitment to I-EDIAA[5], including, but not limited to:
  - Queen’s Strategy[6]
  - Declaration of Commitment to Address Systemic Racism[7]
  - Signatory of the Scarborough Charter[8]
  - Queen’s Campus Wellbeing Framework (priority focus areas: Culture, Belonging & Social Connection, Personal Wellbeing, and Places)[9]
  - United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals[10]
  - Community Engagement[11]
  - Principal’s Action Group for Gender and Sexual Diversity[12]
  - Truth and Reconciliation Commission Task Force[13]

## Opportunities: What are ERGs asking for?

**1. VPCEI** – Centralized support should come from the Office of the VP (Culture, Equity, Inclusion) with this Office acting as a centralized resource and administrator for funds received, with appropriate support from the Human Rights and Equity Office (HREO), Human Resources (HR), and with Departments and Faculties as appropriate.

**2. Collective** – ERG Leaders should have opportunities to meet as a collective to share ideas, find synergies, and collaborate so as to have a stronger voice and connect as a community of practice.

**3. Time** – Dedicated time during work hours (i.e., compensated) to devote to ERG organizing activities and initiatives for ERG Leaders and for members to attend events that extend beyond the lunch hour.

**4. Administrative Support** – Consistent and stable, for such things as booking space for meetings, newsletters, responding to emails, organizing events, managing finances, etc. which would allow ERG leaders to be more strategic with their time.

**There is a great need for a dedicated admin role, that is not perceived as a university interloper.**

**5. Physical Space** – Free and dedicated physical space that is inviting and that can store ERG materials and that can be shared amongst all ERGs.

**6. Website Support** – For the development and maintenance of interactive websites, which is an important engagement tool as it would increase visibility.

**7. Financial Support** – Greater financial support is required, \$1000/year was deemed not sufficient.

**I am burning out, not sustainable, there is not enough time, just trying to keep the ship afloat.**

**8. Communications and Marketing** – Need professional guidance on how best to reach prospective and existing ERG members.

**9. Professional Development** – Desire to develop I-EDIAA and leadership competencies.

**10. Mentorship** – Desire for professional development and continuous improvement in a way that is culturally responsive.

**11. Supervisor and Manager support** – There is a great need for this group to receive a consistent directive on how to support their direct reports in their ERG work in a meaningful way. This could be accomplished with stronger messaging and professional development on how to develop an ERG-inclusive leadership approach.

**12. Senior Leadership endorsement** – Greater awareness of the strategic benefits of ERGs is needed.

**13. Sponsors** – Need for an individual Sponsor (not sponsoring unit) who is willing to use their personal and professional sphere of influence to promote and advocate for ERGs.

**14. Recognition** – ERG Leaders’ work should be deemed as community service to the university at both a staff and faculty level. This work needs to be showcased and recognized at the highest level through meaningful service awards, for example, recognition within Staff Performance Dialogue Processes and Faculty Annual Performance Reviews and Renewal, Tenure and Promotion Processes.

**15. Opportunities** – ERGs would like to be called upon to provide feedback to the university that will be acted upon in meaningful ways.

“  
**My manager has flatout denied my request to have some work time to dedicate to my ERG.**  
”

“  
**ERGs is a recruitment tool but our work is invisible**  
”

### **Aspirations: What do ERGs care deeply about?**

- They want to feel heard and know they have a voice, they want to know that they are valued by the university.
- They want to be involved in helping create solutions and lasting transformational change at the micro, meso, and macro level at the university and in the broader community(ies).
- They want to be part of the establishment and evolution of policies, procedures, and practices – especially when it comes to the principles of I-EDIAA.

### **Results: How do ERGs know they are succeeding?**

There are many compelling reasons to support ERGs within an organization, just some of them are listed below:

- Increased innovation and diversity of thought.
- More inclusive work environments.
- Lower turnover and better recruitment.
- Better organizational culture and higher morale.
- 6 • Better networking and elimination of silos across the university



# Recommendations



## Office of the VPCEI

- 1. Administrative Home** - The Office of the Vice-Principal (Culture, Equity, Inclusion) (VPCEI) should be the administrative home for all ERGs.
- 2. Financial Support** - There should be a guarantee of \$1K with the possibility of receiving additional funds through the Inclusive Community Fund that the Office VPCEI now administers. The VPCEI should encourage faculties and other appropriate administrative units to minimally ‘match’ Inclusive Community Fund monies received by ERGs.
- 3. ERG Webpage** - The ERG webpage should be moved to the Office of the VPCEI and refreshed to reflect all approved changes, to clearly outline a ‘starting an ERG’ process, ‘joining an ERG’ process, and to add a FAQ section. It should be easily searchable and linked to an appropriate area of the Human Resources website.
- 4. Administrative Support** - The Office of the VPCEI should provide administrative, website development, and communications and marketing support to all ERGs.
- 5. Physical Space** - The Office of the VPCEI should secure free and dedicated physical space to all ERGs to conduct their business and store their materials.
- 6. ERG Summit** - The Office of the VPCEI should organize and fund an annual, day long ERG event that provides professional development and networking opportunities for ERG Leadership and members, and provides learning opportunities for Sponsors, Allies, and Senior Leadership.

## Recognition

- 7. Community Service** - The work of ERG leaders should be recognized as community service to the university, and as such, should be consistently granted throughout the university. For faculty, it could mean that their ERG work is considered within the 40-40-20 (research, teaching, community service) model. For staff it could mean the equivalent of 3 hours a week (similar to release time given to staff members to take courses).

There needs to be an understanding that from time to time less than 3 hours a week is needed, and at times, more. This arrangement would be understood as being in place only the duration of o their leadership role within the ERG.

**8. Time** - Appropriate and reasonable time should always be given to ERG members to attend functions that extend beyond the lunch hour or that sometimes occur at other times of day during the workday. . Reasonable time should be granted to members who, for example, volunteer to help organize an event, but are not leaders of an ERG per se. This demonstrates an understanding of the importance of social connection and belonging and the development of leadership skills.

**9. Being Valued** - The contributions to the university of ERG Leaders need to be acknowledged and recognized in meaningful and appropriate ways with the caveat that such recognition be collaborative in nature (i.e., ERGs are aware in advance of university intentions). Ideas include but are not limited to nominations for service awards and yearly catered lunch for ERG Leaders, Sponsors, and key Senior Leaders.

**10. Visibility** - The contributions of ERGs to the university need to be recognized and showcased in meaningful, appropriate and collaborative ways. Ideas include but are not limited to inclusion in VPCEI and/or HREO communications, articles in the Gazette, and a featured article in the Queen’s Alumni Review.

**11. Formal Recognition** - The contributions of ERG Leaders should be formally recognized and documented within Staff Performance Dialogue Processes.

## Professional Development

**12. Mentorship** - Human Resources, with HREO support, should provide formal and culturally responsive mentorship programs for all ERGs.

**13. Attending ERG Events** – Attending ERG events that are not strictly social in nature should be viewed by Managers and Supervisors as professional development for their direct reports.

**14. I-EDIAA Leadership Program** - HR, with the support of HREO, should develop and deliver an I-EDIAA Leadership Program for ERG Leaders under their ‘Building Leadership Capacity @ Queen’s’ initiative. Participation would be optional and have the flexibility to opt in and out of courses over time.

**15. Community of Practice** - Like the Foundational Leadership Program, there should be an I-EDIAA Leadership Program Alumni Group supported by HR and the HREO, thereby building and sustaining a Community of Practice.

# Great Awareness and Support

**16. Senior Leadership** - HREO and HR should develop and deliver ongoing awareness session for Senior Leadership that outlines the organizational benefits of ERGs and how they can engage and seek advice from these groups.

**17. Supervisor and Managers** - HREO and HR should provide training with takeaway guidelines to Supervisors and Managers regarding how to best support ERG Leaders (release time, inclusion of ERG contributions in the PDP, sensitivity concerning some personal ERG related identities).

**18. Joining an ERG** - Greater efforts should be made by HR and Faculty Relations to let prospective, new, and existing staff and faculty know about how to join ERGs and how the university encourages their involvement. For example, a set of Standard Operating Procedures should be developed.

**19. Executive Sponsor** - The HREO should support each ERG in recruiting an Executive Sponsor who will act as an advocate for their group, share information about the group's activities with Senior Leadership and help guide the group's development.

**20. Executive Sponsor Training** - The HREO should offer training and support to Executive Sponsors on how to best support ERGs in a culturally responsive way.

**21. Ambassador Program** - As part of the onboarding process, new employees should be given the opportunity to be matched with selected individuals from an appropriate ERGs with which they identify they navigate their first year at the University. HR and HREO should provide administrative support as required.

## Process

**22. First Point of Contact** - The HREO should be first point of contact to provide initial and ongoing guidance and support on matters relating to forming and sustaining successful ERGs (i.e., facilitate the forming, storming, norming, and performing).

**23. HREO/HR Collaboration** - As appropriate, the HREO should work collaboratively with their HR colleagues (e.g., Organizational Development and Learning, Employee Wellness Services) in support of the success of ERGs.

**24. I-EDIAA** - The HREO should be available to provide advice on I-EDIAA matters.

**25. ERG Collective** - An ERG Collective or Council comprised of all ERG leaders should be formed which would give them opportunities to socially connect, share information and knowledge, and work together on common issues and goals.

## Additional Recommendations

**26. Process** - There should be a clear, documented process for starting an ERG.

**27. Process** - There should be a clear, documented process for joining an ERG.

**28. Standard Operating Procedures** - In order to empower ERG Leaders to work effectively there should be well-documented Standard Operating Procedures so they can make the most out of their time.

**29. Create Joint Initiatives** - Synergies of effort should be found across all ERGs as appropriate. Great example is the International Women's Day events that continues to be co-hosted by QWN and WiSQ and the Diverse Wellness Luncheon which took place as part of Thrive Week this year.

**30. ERG Toolkit** - HREO should create an ERG Toolkit[14] containing universal templates that ERGs can use that still allows for the uniqueness and autonomy of each ERG. Example templates can include Terms of Reference, ERG Activities Tracker, Checklist for an Executive Sponsor, Event Communication, Key Performance Indicators, and so on. Additional templates could include an ERG Charter and a 3-year Strategic Plan[15]

**31. ERG Gap Analysis** - HREO should conduct a gap analysis of what other equity-deserving groups would benefit from having an ERG (e.g., Ability ERGs, Parents and Caregivers ERGs, Veterans ERG).

**32. Time** - Allies and other non-ERG members should be allowed to attend functions that extend beyond the lunch hour or that sometimes occur at other times of day during the workday. For example, attending an event that brings in a speaker on I-EDIAA.

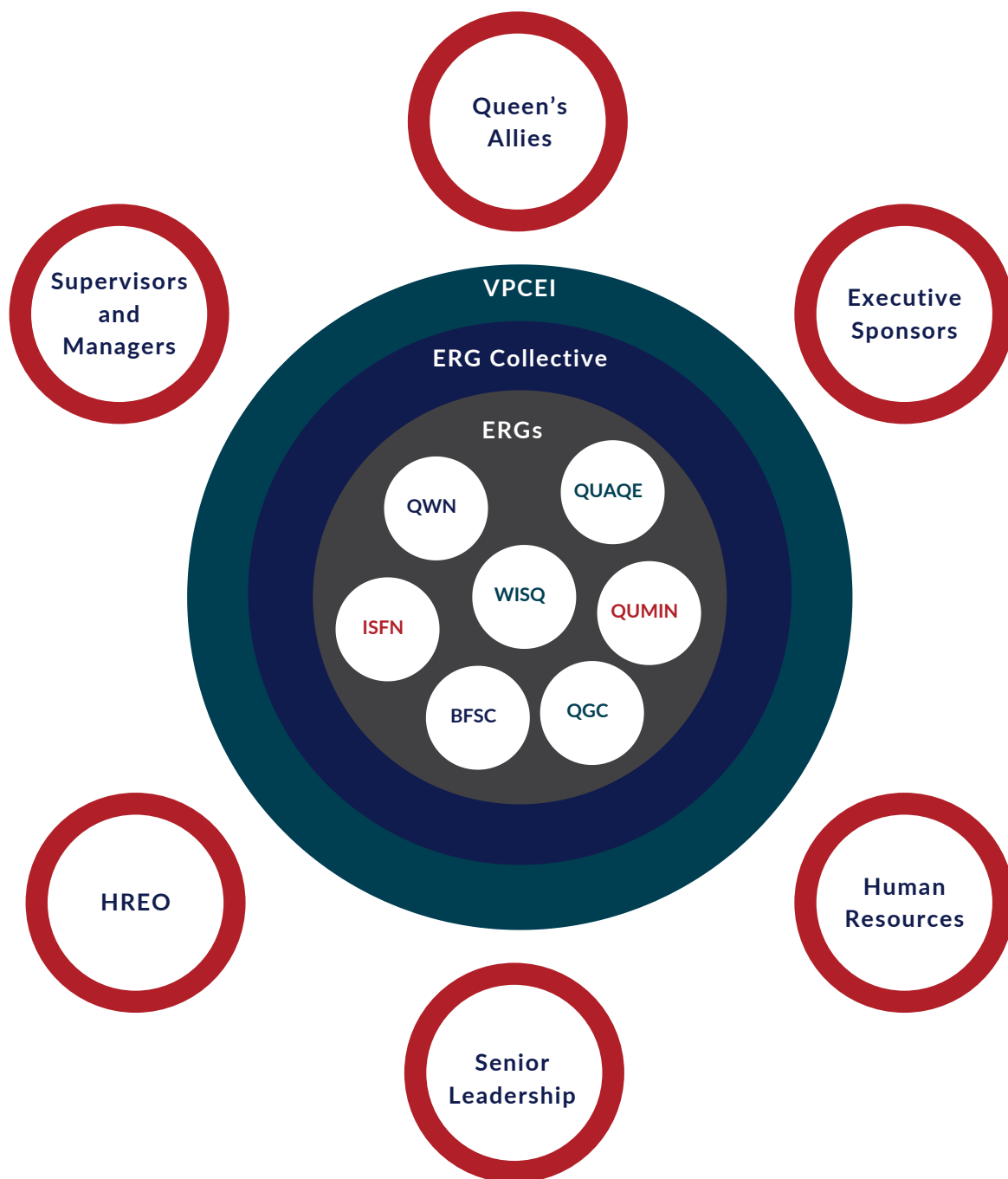
# Matters for Further Consideration

- **Intersectionality** - The subject of the intersectionality of one's social identity came up in nearly every discussion. For example, which ERG does a black Muslim woman join? All? One? What does that mean for time release? Co-hosting activities and events and working together on common issues can provide a partial solution to this dilemma.
- **Allies** - On balance, the literature supports the inclusion and participation of Allies within ERGs. In fact, it is considered a best practice by many[16]. This view is not shared by the majority of ERG Leaders at Queen's. It is a difficult dynamic to moderate as the potential exists for allies to unintentionally dominate the conversation or speak on behalf of the ERG members, instead of listening and learning from them. However, if done well, allyship can be a powerful way to enhance the impact and value of ERGs for both their members and the organization[17]. Ultimately, the decision in terms of how to include and leverage Allies depends on the needs and preferences of each ERG. For example, one ERG has different communication channels for 'members' vs 'allies', with some events open to all.
- **Remote Employees** - Queen's has employees that work from home and on off-campus facilities in Kingston and abroad. What can be done to ensure their inclusion and sense of belonging?
- **Engaging our Alumni** - How can ERGs engage with and derive support from the university's alumni and alumni chapters (e.g., Indigenous, Black, and Queer Alumni Chapters)?



# Processes and Frameworks

## ERG Circles of Support



## 1. Employee Resource Groups

Employee Resource Groups (ERGS, Networks, Caucuses) arise because of grassroots initiatives of diverse and inspired employees who are supported by their organization which consciously invests in creating a culture of engagement. As such they have huge potential to support the organization's recruitment, retention, and strategic goals (Kostecka, Martyniak, Lis, 2021). Listed below are the seven ERGs that have formed or are emerging:

- Queen's Women's Network (formed as an ERG in 2015)
- Black Faculty and Staff Caucus (formed as a Caucus in 2017)
- Women in Science at Queen's (formed as an ERG in 2019)
- Queen's University Association for Queer Employees (formed as an ERG in 2020)
- International Staff & Faculty Network (began pre-ERG work in 2022)
- Indigenous Staff & Faculty Network (formed as an ERG in 2023)
- Queen's University Muslim Inclusion Network (formed as an ERG in 2023)

## 2. Employee Resource Group Collective

The Collective provides a structured forum for ERG leaders to share ideas and best practices and to offer insights to senior leadership about how Queen's University might improve policies, procedures, practices, and structures to better achieve its I-EDIAA goals.

## 3. Executive Sponsors

Executive Sponsors are individuals who are willing to use their personal and professional sphere of influence to mentor and advocate for the ERGs with the aim of making a case to other senior leaders to lend their support to the ERGs' goals (Kostecka, Martyniak, Lis, 2021).

## 4. Queen's Allies

Allies are not members of the identity groups but act in solidarity with them and are a critical part of the success of ERGs and their members.

## 5. Office of the Vice-Principal (Culture, Equity, and Inclusion)

Provides an administrative home for all ERGs by providing appropriate administrative support, website development and maintenance support, communications and marketing support, and support for the financial management of the ERGs.

## 6. The Human Rights and Equity Office

Provides ongoing guidance and support on matters relating to forming and sustaining successful ERGs and I-EDIAA matters.

## 7. Human Resources

Promotes ERGs and encourages new (Onboarding) and existing employees to get involved. Provides guidance and support to ERGs on HR matters (e.g., Mentorship Programs).

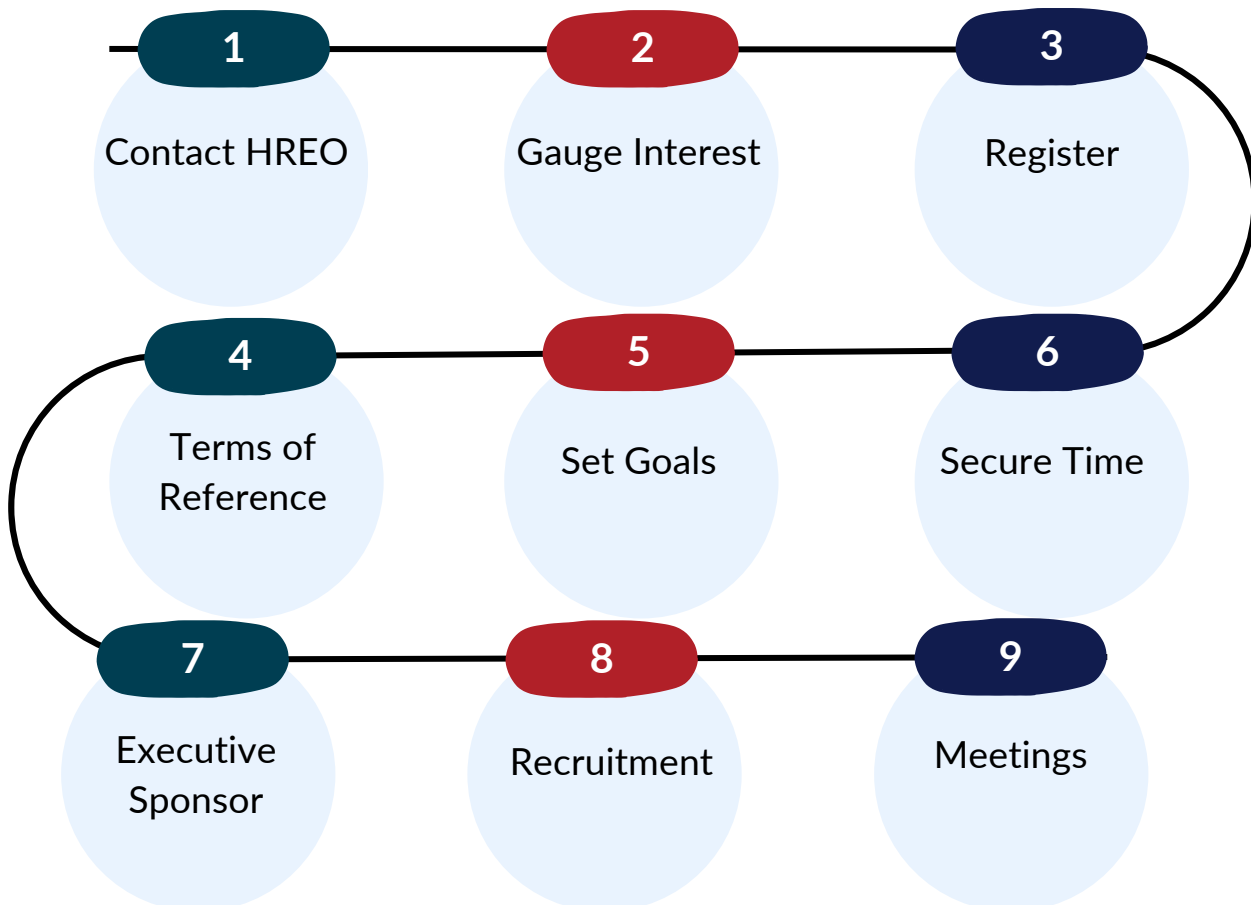
## 8. Supervisors and Managers

Provide employees adequate time during working hours to lead/organize/conduct or participate in ERG activities. Recognize their employee's service to the Queen's community as part of the annual performance Dialogue Process. Understands that ERG member participation is a form of professional development.

## 9. Senior Leadership

Understands that engagement of perspectives at every level of the organization is critical in advancing its I-EDIAA and strategic goals, both internally and externally.

# 'How To Create an ERG' Process [18]







**1. Contact Human Rights and Equity Office** - An Equity Advisor will be assigned to support you through the process. Human Resources will also provide support where necessary.

**2. Gauge Interest** - This can be done through a survey, focus groups, or simply talking to other potential members. Identify at least five founding members who are willing to assume leadership roles.

**3. Register** - Register with the Office of the VPCEI. Although employees can choose to meet and support each other informally, it is typically a good idea to cue the university to the group's formation. This will then allow you to apply for funding and garner administrative support from this office, and perhaps other units and individuals on campus as well.

**4. Secure Time** - The Office of the VPCEI can help your leadership members secure reasonable and compensated time for the ERG work they do during their leadership term (this could look like several hours a week for one- or two-year term).

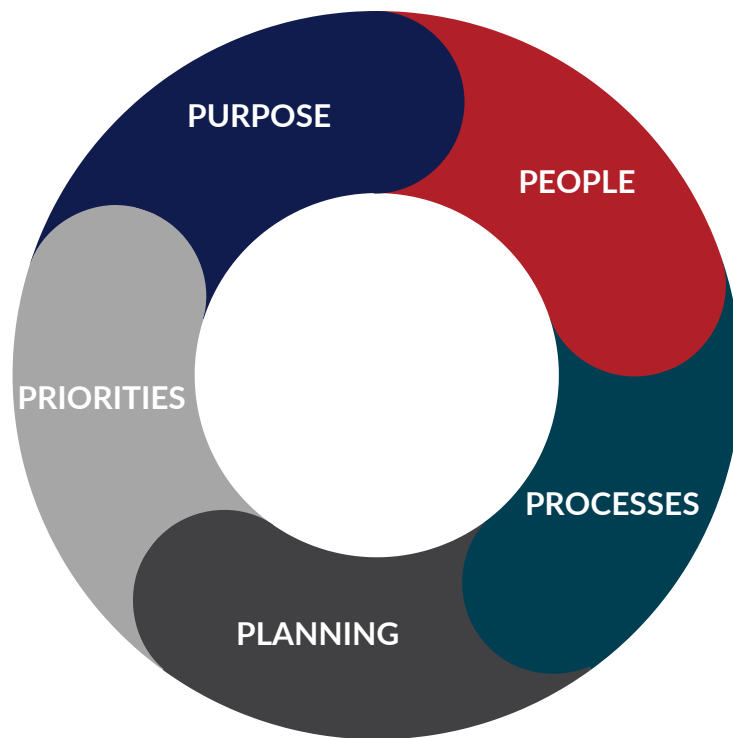
**5. Set Goals** - Define the mission, vision, and values of the ERG, and how it will both support both its members and the university. Decide the name of the ERG. Submit goals to the Office of the VPCEI.

**6. Terms of Reference** - Write a founding document that accounts for the formation, governance, and operating principles of the ERG, including the role of the Executive Sponsor, budgetary guidelines, term limits, and communication and meeting requirements. Submit terms of reference to the Office of the VPCEI.

**7. Executive Sponsor** - Find an Executive Sponsor who will champion the ERG internally.

**8. Recruitment** - Recruit more members. Make a public announcement that the ERG has been formed and invite others to participate. Recruitment efforts should be ongoing.

**9. Meetings** - Plan and run your first meeting. Decide on the agenda, format, and frequency of the ERG meetings.



## **Purpose**

The purpose (Vision and Mission) should be clear and articulated in a way that is easy to understand for its members and for the university community.

## **People**

Make a list of the key interested parties that you want involved with your group and think about your goals for engaging each one of them.

## **Processes**

Supporting units (VPCEI, HREO, HR) and respective Executive Sponsors should be readily available for advice, support, necessary approvals, and any questions. This can foster a sense of confidence in ERG leaders that they are on the right track.

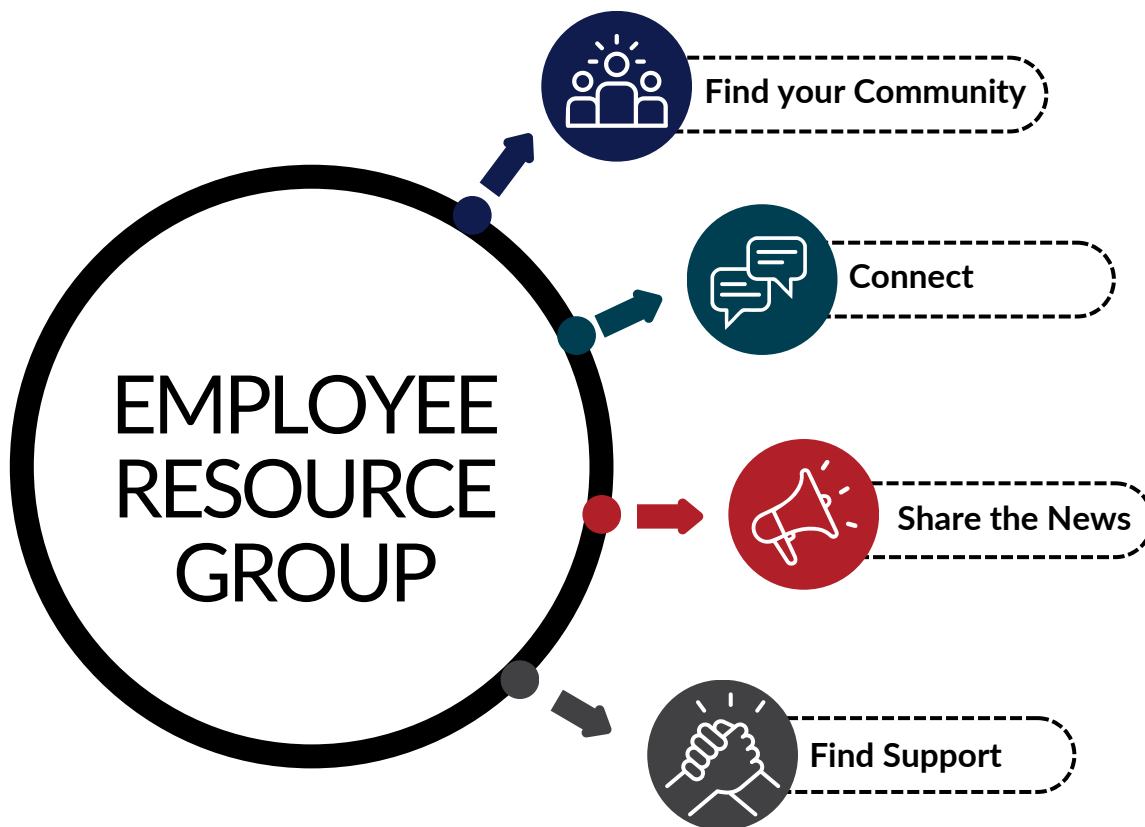
## **Planning**

When planning events and activities it is important to always come back to the purpose, vision, and mission of the ERG. Check in with the leaders of other groups to see if there can be some joint events.

## **Priorities**

Brainstorm all the activities you'd like to do in a year and set out to organize when and how (e.g., sub-committees) they can happen and if they can align with key moments throughout the year (e.g., Black History Month) and with what the university is offering. Planning with priorities in mind is both strategic and a way to ensure the sustainability of your ERG.

# 'How To Join an ERG' Process



1. **Find your Community** - Visit the Office of the VPCEI website to find out if there are any existing groups that match your interests or needs.

2. **Connect** - Contact the ERG that you want to join. They will provide you with details on how to become a member.

3. **Share the News** - Let your Manager or Supervisor know that you have joined an ERG and that from time to time you may need time beyond the lunch hour to attend ERG events.

4. **Find Support** - Contact the Office of the VPCEI and/or the HREO if you have any questions or concerns.



# Sources and Resources

- [1] Source: [ERG-Playbook-final.pdf \(ergscenter.com\)](#)
- [2] Source: [Toolkit for Developing a D&I Strategy \(ccdi.ca\)](#)
- [3] Sources: [ERG-Playbook-final.pdf \(ergscenter.com\)](#) and [EmployeeResourceGroup-StructureandGuidance-20201111.pdf \(bc.edu\)](#)
- [4] Source: Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. K. (2005). Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change. Berrett-Koehler.
- [5] Source: I-EDIAA Announcement, November 25, 2022 <https://www.queensu.ca/hreo/i-ediaa-announcement>
- [6] Source: <https://www.queensu.ca/strategy/>
- [7] Source: <https://www.queensu.ca/principal/edii/declaration-commitment-address-systemic-racism>
- [8] Source: <https://www.queensu.ca/principal/i-ediaa/scarborough-charter>
- [9] Source: <https://www.queensu.ca/campuswellnessproject/campus-wellbeing-framework>
- [10] <https://www.queensu.ca/principal/strategy/sustainable-development-goals/sdgs-queens>
- [11] Source: <https://www.queensu.ca/principal/strategy/community-engagement>
- [12] Source: <https://www.queensu.ca/hreo/initiatives/principals-action-group-gender-and-sexual-diversity>
- [13] Source: <https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/truth-and-reconciliation/committees-and-working-groups>
- [14] Source: [Resources – ERGs Center](#)
- [15] Source: <https://ccc.bc.edu/content/dam/ccc/4.%20Reports/dei-2021/EmployeeResourceGroup-StructureandGuidance-20201111.pdf>
- [16] Source: [Toolkit for Developing a D&I Strategy \(ccdi.ca\)](#)
- [17] Source: [ERG Resources From Catalyst | Catalyst](#)
- [18] Source: [27 Employee Resource Groups Best Practices for 2023 \(teambuilding.com\)](#)
- [19] Source: [How to Start an Employee Resource Group \(ERG\) | Built In](#)

# Resources

[27 Employee Resource Groups Best Practices for 2023 \(teambuilding.com\)](#)

[EmployeeResourceGroup-StructureandGuidance-20201111.pdf \(bc.edu\)](#)

[ERG-Playbook-final.pdf \(ergscenter.com\)](#)

[ERG Resources From Catalyst | Catalyst](#)

[How to Start an Employee Resource Group \(ERG\) | Built In](#)

[Resources - ERGs Center](#)

[SOAR-Template.pdf \(peregrineglobal.com\)](#)

[Toolkit for Developing a D&I Strategy \(ccdi.ca\)](#)



# Contact Us



[equity@queensu.ca](mailto:equity@queensu.ca)



[queensu.ca/equity](http://queensu.ca/equity)



**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
**AND EQUITY OFFICE**