

2024 SUMMIT RECAP



ERG
+BRG
+AG

WASHINGTON
EMPLOYERS

FOR RACIAL
EQUITY

**Employee &
Business & Affinity
Resource Groups**

ADVANCING BLACK TALENT.

ERG+BRG+AG

Employee & Business & Affinity Resource Groups

2024 SUMMIT RECAP

On June 27th, our Task Force on Advancing Black Talent sponsored its first summit on Employee Resource, Business Resource, and Affinity Groups at Tabor 100 in Tukwila. Keynote speaker, Sterling De Sutter Summerville, M.Ed., provided perspectives and wisdom on advancing the work of these critical functions within private workplaces. We held three breakouts led by WERE task force leaders and gained insights from across the coalition.



Some of the areas we explored together:

- + The biggest challenges of leading ERG/BRG/AG work
- + Ally support of employees within ERG/BRG/AG focused on Black Talent
- + The role of the executive sponsor
- + The emotional labor volunteers experience in leading ERG/BRG/AG work
- + Increasing engagement and adding value to your constituents
- + Demonstrating impact connected to your ERG/BRG/AG activities
- + What is next for maturing and sustaining ERG/BRG/AG groups

WERE asked:

If you could have a wish list for equity and inclusion efforts, what would it be?

“Better HR foundations to stand upon and more time. People want transformation on a quick turnaround and that isn’t how it works.”



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- + Executive sponsorship of ERG/BRG/AG remains a critical factor to success and sustainability
- + Professional development for ERG/BRG/AG leaders is essential for a resilient group
- + Sponsors/Allies remain shy about engaging Black leaders for professional development opportunities



Working definitions of each group:

ERG, BRG, AG are often used interchangeably, however, their features, structures, activity purpose, and benefits vary depending on the specific organization, its leadership, the involvement of company executives, financial capacity, mission alignment, and workplace culture.

EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP – ERG

Employee Resource Groups are voluntary, employee-led groups that aim to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace that is aligned with the organizations they serve.

They're usually led and participated in by employees who share a characteristic, whether it's gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, lifestyle, or interest. The groups exist to provide support and help in personal or career development and to create a space where employees can bring their whole selves to the table. Allies may also join the ERG to support their colleagues.

According to TopMBA, ERGs are found in 90% of Fortune 500 companies. Unsurprisingly, many Great Place To Work Certified™ companies, including Ernst & Young LLP, KPMG LLP, Zillow, and AT&T, have ERGs.

BUSINESS RESOURCE GROUPS – BRG

Business Resource Groups are voluntary, employee-led groups that serve as a resource for members and their employers by fostering a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with organizational mission, values, goals, business practices and objectives. They play an integral role in creating a culture that promotes an environment of understanding, acceptance, and inclusion among all employees.

Research from Great Place to Work® tells us that employees who trust that they will be treated fairly, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or age, are **nearly 10 times more likely to look forward to going to work and over five times more likely to want to stay a long time at their company**. Other benefits of BRGs include the development of future leaders, increased employee engagement, and expanded marketplace reach.

AFFINITY GROUP – AG

By most definitions, an affinity group (AG) is an informal, voluntary, diverse employee-led team without direct ties to an employer's DEI agenda. Their members may have shared backgrounds based on race, gender, age, physical disability, or sexual orientation, or they may have common interests, like art or mountain climbing. They are more about creating space for employees to connect over things they are passionate about, even if it isn't related to their daily work.



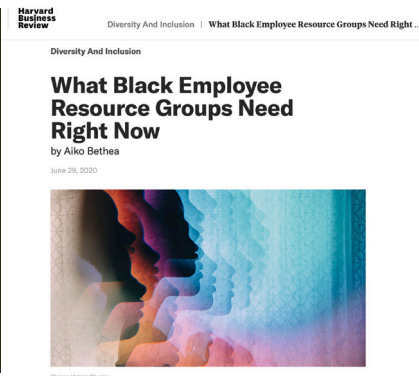
The work ahead:

While many employment opportunities in Washington state create pathways to a stable income, family benefits and career path opportunities, employers regularly report that retaining Black employees is one of their priority human resource recruitment concerns. When we speak with Black employees who are planning to or who have left the region, they report that they often do not experience a sense of belonging, trust, and respect in the working environment that leads to their long-term desire to stay in an employment arrangement. When employees do not feel a sense of belonging, they report feeling isolated, not being selected for opportunities for professional growth, experiencing racial prejudice, and feeling work-stress related health problems.¹ Black individuals who have left the region have also reported not finding enough community connections within the Central Puget Sound.



Aiko Bethea writes,

“Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), also referred to as business network groups or affinity groups, have served and supported the culture of corporate America since the 1970s. Typically organized around a shared identity, such as race, gender, age, or mental health, they serve as a haven of belonging, offering a space for underrepresented employees to find one another, stave off a sense of isolation, and experience a reprieve from the daily aggressions they’ve endured at work.”



“Black professionals often do not feel welcomed and included in the workplace and are not represented enough in communities around the Central Puget Sound. As a result, companies are at risk of losing investments they have made in recruitment and retention of Black employees. The impact of losing workforce diversity also results in a less competitive workforce overall due to a drain on talents and valuable perspectives that diverse workforces need to innovate. Many Black Americans are entering corporate America with dreams, ready to do great things, but are met with an unwelcoming culture.”²

A lack of psychological safety and opportunities to grow in their professional discipline in the workplace leads the way as a leading factor impacting a Black employee’s sense of belonging. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM),

“68% of Black HR professionals believe their organizations aren’t providing enough career advancement opportunities for Black employees, or access to executive leadership or sponsorships and mentoring networks. In addition, Black professionals are more likely to encounter racial prejudice and microaggressions than any other racial or ethnic group. Forty-three percent of Black executives have had colleagues use racially insensitive language in their presence. Microaggressions include having a colleague touch their hair without permission, being mischaracterized as “angry,” and being excluded from growth opportunities or one-on-one meetings with leadership.”³

The emergence of Employee Resource Groups (ERG), Business Resource Groups (BRG), Affinity Groups (AG) benefits employees and are a great way for organizations to attract retain and advance Black talent. ERGs, BRGs, and Affinity Groups are communities of workers with shared identities, experiences, and interests. ERGs were first pioneered in 1970 for Black employees at Xerox and remain as relevant as ever.⁴

1. Barriers for Black Professionals (shrm.org)

2. Key Findings - BEING BLACK IN CORPORATE AMERICA (talentinnovation.org)

3. Barriers for Black Professionals (shrm.org)

4. What Black Employee Resource Groups Need Right Now (hbr.org)

TOP TIPS TO SET UP, SUSTAIN & MAINTAIN ERGS, BRGS & AGS



- **Seek input from employees:** ERGs/BRGs/AGs are employee-led groups. Organizations can leverage employee engagement surveys to become aware of belonging concerns that the development of an ERG/BRG/AG may address. Note that ERG/BRG/AGs are common in the United States. If your organization is a global corporation, these groups' purpose and structure may differ.
- **Executive leadership buy-in:** Executive sponsorship is key to a successful ERG/BRG/AG. This may involve making or restating a business case for the value of the ERG/BRG/AGs. Executive sponsors should ensure that line managers, other departments and the board understand how these programs connect to the bottom line and support retention strategies and performance targets.
- **Recruit ERG leaders:** To establish the ERG/BRG/AG, a volunteer leader(s) should be approved and assigned to the effort.
- **Executive Sponsor and ERG/BRG/AG leaders work together to establish the ERG/BRG/AG aligned to your organization's DEI goals and policy goals:** Using insights from employee sentiment data, develop a mission statement, operating expectations, applicable employee resource group policy, and reporting structure with roles and responsibilities and a cadence of meetings, regular agenda, and staffing. Keep records and store them in shared directories.
- **Recruit employees:** To sustain the ERG/BRG/AG and to ensure that you have a sustainable pipeline of leadership and operational experts who can deliver on the mission, be sure to encourage others to join by spreading the word in onboarding materials, company meetings, corporate communications platforms, and through social media.
- **Get and stay connected to your assigned ERG leaders:** Even if your ERG/BRG/AG is small, you can make a big impact by connecting with groups from other organizations. Network with ERG/BRG/AGs across and outside your organization to learn best practices, leverage, and share resources.
- **Allocate resources:** Don't just count on the passion of volunteers to initiate and sustain membership in an ERG/BRG/AG. Begin with allocating resources for programs, professional development, and incidental expenses. Make sure you provide structural and financial support to sustain the ERG/BRG/AG.
- **Measure your impact:** Track engagement metrics and membership growth, event participation, and employee engagement survey results to determine the health of your ERG/BRG/AG efforts.
- **Continue to adapt to new realities as the group grows:** Be aware, flexible, and adaptable to what ERG/BRG/AG members want and need.
- **Leverage the mature ERG/BRG/AG as a valuable strategic partner:** Consider the ways that ERGs/BRG/AGs can support broader efforts beyond talent recruitment, such as marketing and product development initiatives. There are BRG models that offer important diverse perspectives that spark innovation and can reduce bias in product development cycles.

Support for Black Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): Progress and Challenges in Allyship

Allies are actively working to uplift Black ERG/BRG/AGs by amplifying the voices and experiences of Black talent within the organization. Their efforts are progressing in several key areas:

- **Intentional Partnerships:** Allies consciously choose to engage with suppliers and partners owned by People of Color (POC), ensuring that their business choices align with their commitment to diversity.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Programs like “White Men as Diversity Partners” and Catalyst’s “Men Advocating Real Change” is being utilized by allies to deepen their understanding of diversity and their role within it.
- **Embracing Discomfort:** Recognizing that allyship is a continuous learning process, allies are acknowledging the discomfort that can come with this work and are choosing to engage despite the challenges.
- **“Bring a Friend” Approach:** Allies are expanding their influence by inviting others to join them in attending diversity-related events, fostering a culture of inclusivity, and shared learning.



Significant challenges remain in supporting ERG/BRG/AGs:

- **Conditional Allyship:** Only offering support when it aligns with their comfort zone or personal interests, making their allyship inconsistent and unreliable.
- **Limited Engagement:** Focusing support only during specific times, such as Black History Month, rather than maintaining a year-round commitment.
- **Communication Barriers:** Allies may not effectively translate HR initiatives or business strategies in a way that resonates with the broader employee base, leading to misunderstandings.
- **Superficial Solutions:** Allies may not fully listen to the needs of the Black community, resulting in actions that unintentionally cause harm or fail to address the core issues.
- **Dependence on Guidance:** Allies may rely too heavily on Black colleagues for direction rather than taking initiative to educate themselves.
- **Executive Sponsorship:** Sponsors may not adequately fund initiatives or fully understand their responsibilities in supporting Black ERG/BRG/AGs.



BENEFITS OF ERGS, BRGS & AGS

- **Foster community of underrepresented groups:** Provides space where Black employees can connect and support each other.
- **Support inclusivity and belonging goals:** Demonstrates a commitment to creating inclusive workplace cultures.
- **Build trust:** Delivers on the promise of your commitment to support Black employee wellbeing.
- **Increase retention:** Employees stay longer when they have accessed a BRG/ERG/AG.
- **Support career advancement:** Employees see greater career progression.
- **Valuable recruiting tool:** Employees are increasingly looking for companies with active ERG/BRG/AGs.
- **Leadership pipeline tool:** As opportunities emerge the ERG/BRG/AG will become a valuable recruiting engine.
- **Awareness building:** ERG/BRG/AGs do powerful work promoting cross-cultural understanding.
- **Promotes and develops employee agency:** As employees sustain the ERG/BRG/AGs mission, structure, and operation, they understand more about the structures of advancement, work satisfaction, and cross-cultural communication success.



Final Thoughts:

Black workers want to be valued and connected authentically with the organizations they choose to work for. Organizations benefit from a workplace culture that gives employees a sense of belonging. BRG/ERG/AGs are valuable support and networking resources and spaces where employees can develop and leverage a network that will help them advance within your company. BRG/ERG/AGs are valuable ways to hear Black employee voices and learn about unique perspectives not accessed through typical management communication channels. Employers can support important professional development opportunities, mentor, and sponsorship experiences through partnership with engaging with ERG, BRG, and AG leaders. These groups are proven engines to build a sustaining culture of inclusion while making a positive impact on your business.