

BLOG



ERG Leader's Guide to Gender Partnership

October 22, 2024

Is your ERG inclusive enough for allies?

As ERG leaders, we want to engage with employees across levels. The more engagement we can create, the more we can move the needle on culture change at our organizations. But according to two of our experts, men at all levels, particularly White men, often feel left out of ERG conversations, and thus do not engage as often or deeply, if at all.

At our recent [enERGize](#) virtual event, nearly all of our speakers, regardless of the subject of their particular session, mentioned that securing the buy-in of senior leaders is crucial for employee resource groups (ERGs) to thrive. And since much of the corporate world's leadership is still made up of White men, this group of potential allies, advocates, gender partners, champions, and sponsors, is crucial to connect with.

Read on to learn why White men and other dominant culture groups are falling through the cracks and how your ERG can send the right [messages](#).

Affinity is important, but so are allies.

Catalyst works to create [resources](#) for the betterment of ERGs because they can be invaluable to their members. When done well, ERGs can provide community, a space for grassroots organizing, and a structure for sharing resources, knowledge, and advice. ERGs are places where members can be themselves, where they look out for one another, and where they work for the collective good of the group.

But they can always do bigger and better things with the help of others:

- With an **executive sponsor**, an ERG can secure funding that will help members create or sustain programming and events. Executives don't always belong to affinity groups.
- With **champions**, the accomplishments of the group can be mentioned in the right places at the right times. Their voices can be [amplified](#) and their impact widened.
- **Advocates** can devote time to you and your members. They may help you set up programs, mentor one or more of your leaders, and use whatever influence they have to represent the interests of your ERG in their business area.
- **Allies** at all levels of the organization can actively recruit new members and help bring in new allies. They can also begin conversations in spaces where they otherwise might not take place.

Sponsors, champions, advocates, and allies can uplift your ERG. You can do without them, but you'll do a whole lot more with them.

ERG leaders:

Topics: [Allyship And Advocacy](#)

[Inclusive Workplaces](#)

[Organizational Culture Change](#)

[Race, Ethnicity, And Culture](#)

Taking strides toward equity in Canadian women's sports

Two trailblazing women in Canadian

- Do you have any members who do not share your group's identity?
- Do you have an executive sponsor?
- Does your company allow executive sponsors to support your ERG via funding?
- Can anyone in the organization be considered an ERG champion?
- Does your ERG have any sponsorship or mentorship programs?

Empathize with the feeling of exclusion.

We shouldn't be surprised at the current [backlash against DEI](#). For so long, inclusion efforts have been focused on women, LGBTQ+ communities, and people from diverse racial and ethnic groups, leaving straight White men out entirely. While some understood that their presence as allies was needed and joined DEI spaces, others felt excluded, alienated, and even vilified.

It's an unfortunate fallacy that if efforts are put into helping some groups of people, anyone else must therefore be at a disadvantage. If members of an ERG are special, what about everyone else? Are they now less than?

And since DEI teachings include terms like "privilege" and it is generally agreed that [White men have most of it](#), they may feel specifically not welcome in spaces meant to create safety and community for groups that have suffered historical oppression and disadvantages. They may want to get involved but it might feel wrong. Just as many women have historically felt excluded from the "boys' club" and "frat house" cultures of workplaces dominated by men, many White men feel unsure of themselves in ERGs whose members are exclusively women or exclusively Latine or exclusively Indigenous.

Everyone knows this feeling. Ever gone to meet your significant other's whole family for a holiday dinner or reunion? Or been the plus one at a wedding?

On an individual basis, we can feel each other's discomfort and our empathy kicks in. We take our partner's hand and introduce them to everyone. We sit a single person at a table with people who we think they'll get along with.

Even if a given coworker isn't in the best possible mindset to be an ally yet, they certainly won't get there if they continue to feel like they're not allowed to be part of DEI efforts or that your ERG doesn't want their help.

ERG leaders:

- What incentive can you create for allies to join your ERG?
- How will you let them know they belong in your ERG?

Let allies know they are welcome and needed.

Brian DeMartino wouldn't have volunteered on his own to join a women's ERG. He didn't know that he could or should. But when he was invited, it changed his career for the better. At Catalyst's enERGize session "Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: ERGs as the Impetus for Gender Partnership," DeMartino, now Global HR Operations Manager at Bechtel Corporation, told the story of how he became involved with a women's ERG there early in his career. Though they are now known as business resource groups (BRGs) at Bechtel, at the time they were ERGs, and he was approached about becoming cochair of the newly forming Glendale, Arizona chapter of the "Women at Bechtel" ERG.

He now encourages others to explicitly invite people who don't identify with their affinity group to join as allies. DeMartino said, "It wasn't just a resource group focused for literally what the name implied, which is women at Bechtel, but really a group that was also meant to bring in our male allies as well, to help with some of this conversation around equity and inclusion and knowing that all of us play a role. I'm very aware sitting here today, looking at myself in the camera, that I'm not the face of diversity and inclusion from the standpoint of, I don't meet the qualifiers of being a part of an underrepresented group. That said, everybody has a role in this conversation."

ERG leaders:

- Are you reaching out directly to members outside your ERG in dominant culture groups and other potential allies about joining?
- Are your flyers, emails, and event invitations explicit in mentioning that allies and advocates who are not members of the affinity group are welcome and encouraged to participate?
- Do you send out invitations and materials written specifically for and to allies?
- Do you know what role you want your non-affinity members to play in your groups?
- Are you engaging with them actively and respectfully?

Provide ample opportunities for allies to engage.

Speaking at enERGize. Justin Bannino. Planning Manager. Stations Work Program Management at Hydro One.

gave his unique perspective as cochair of a men's ERG called "Men as Allies." Hydro One empowered the men in the organization to identify and act as allies to other groups. He confirms that a lot of men are still on the outside looking in at ERGs and other diversity and inclusion efforts. He gave an example: men working out in the [field](#).

He said, "They don't really get the messaging, right? Like, a lot of them don't even have access to email all the time. And a lot of this stuff comes out through...email communications or big, corporate-wide telecast or online telecast."

DeMartino offered a solution, saying, "Not everybody's going to be able to attend every one of the lunch-and-learn programs that you have, but if you tailor them at times that are going to be accessible, again, not only from thinking about it from a geographic difference perspective but also just from being able to attend and access this material."

Banninga added, "I think, you know, meet people where they are and try to connect them to the human stories. And I think it brings those folks, those men in the field especially, into those conversations in a way that they feel included as well. And I think you'll find that they are doing a lot of these things anyway, because it's the right thing to do."

ERG leaders:

- Are you engaging potential allies across all levels? Across all regions?
- Are your events scheduled so that employees in multiple time zones can attend?
- Are employees from each shift able to attend at least one of your regular events?
- Are your events given in multiple languages?

Once allies have come in, keep them steady on common ground.

Connecting people seems to be the simplest way to drive out fear of the unknown about each other. Once your ERGs have brought men into women's groups, or White men into ERGs for different racial and ethnic groups, making them stay and engage comes down to what we all have in common. What do we all want? What can we all work toward together? What do we all struggle with? In what ways do we all need each other?

Often, that's all any of us needs to thrive in unfamiliar territory. Banninga said, "What I encourage [men] to do is just listen to the stories of others, and listen to the stories of women that are attending these sessions with you and people from diverse backgrounds that are attending, and start to see that there are a lot of common threads outside of the more theoretical DEI language that connects you. [...] We're all human beings. We all want to be able to be ourselves in a safe place at work, a psychologically safe space."

Questions for RG leaders to consider:

- Are you managing your expectations of the allies in your ERGs?
- Are you granting them the space to learn and even make mistakes?
- Are you assuming positive intent?

Moving the needle on your company's culture takes the whole company, not just the underrepresented groups that usually make up ERG memberships. White men can be a great resource for allyship, advocacy, and [gender partnership](#), so long as they are made to feel that they are welcome, too.

Send the right invitation: A checklist

- 1. Is your event invitation explicit about who you're inviting?** For example, if you're inviting a White man to an event for a Black ERG, make sure you state that the event is for ERG members *and allies*. This will avoid confusion.
- 2. Is your event type inclusive?** For example, an after-work social event won't be great for working parents who have to pick up their kids as soon as work ends. You won't be able to accommodate every single person but polling your participants (and allies) in advance when planning should help you find an activity that works for most.
- 4. Is your location accessible?** For example, you wouldn't hold an event in a country club deep in the suburbs if your whole employee population lives in the city. And you wouldn't expect ERG members and allies to travel weekly to the main office HQ if your workforce is fully remote.
- 5. Are you being explicit about what role you are asking your invitee to play?** If you invite someone outside of your affinity group to attend, let them know how you want them to show up. Do you want them to speak to the group about their subject matter expertise? Do you want them to attend a meeting simply as an observer? Do you want them to offer advice and answer questions?
- 6. Is your event invitation enticing?** If someone sent you an invitation to a party, what would excite

you about going? Food? Drinks? Games? There should be *something* that benefits the invitee, even if it's just a good time.

Download the full checklist using the form below.

Download the checklist

First Name *

Last Name *

Work Email *

Job Title *

Would you like to speak to Catalyst about becoming a Supporter organization?

I would like to receive the latest Catalyst newsletters.

I consent to the Catalyst [Privacy Policy](#).

SUBMIT

BLOG



September 24, 2024

Don't be a bystander. Learn how to be active and effective when colleagues need support.

In moments of collective distress for underrepresented groups, it's often a company's [Employee Resource Groups \(ERGs\)](#) that are both affected by crises and expected to respond to them. That's why these groups need [allies](#) both in and outside their ranks. This is a common scenario, and while there's no one-size-fits-all approach, there are ways to be prepared to help.

1. ERGs should plan for how they will support each other.

Jamie Bergeron, Associate Director, Americas Diversity, Equity, & Inclusiveness Center of Excellence at EY, spoke about ERGs at Catalyst's 2024 enERGize conference. She advised, "I really think that building into your ERG annual plan the ways that you show up for other ERGs, or having a crisis response plan as a group, is a really important endeavor. When something happens in the news or globally that might impact a community that your ERG is not necessarily representing, [...] what can your ERG do, and how can you activate quickly?"

"[...] Having some real planning around that and thinking through what kind of collaborative ally you want to be among the entire ERG community at your organization is an investment of time and strategy that I think makes it possible for us to show up authentically, connected with one another, so that in those moments of crisis we're not doing the strategy and planning then."

2. Empower employees to check in on each other individually.

A one-on-one check-in can make a big difference for an ERG member dealing with a crisis, according to Nicole McCormick, Senior Manager - National Assignment & Indigenous News Team, CityNews, Rogers Communications. She said, "Often people think allyship and supporting ERGs has to be this big show. It doesn't. [...] It can be [...] a Teams message. Say, 'Hey, I'm aware of what's happening in the world right now. How can I support you?'"

Bergeron said that her Business Resource Group created a one-on-one check-in how-to guide. She said, "It seems like it should be a natural part of how we connect among colleagues. But what we see over and over is that [people really freeze](#). They really hesitate to [...] ping someone, send that email, walk over to their desk." They reframed checking in to be "a really intentional and proactive action that we should incorporate not just in times of collective distress but all of the time so that we actually are more connected in real ways to what we each actually need."

3. Offer to temporarily ease workloads.

If employees notice that colleagues are struggling, Bergeron said that "those are great opportunities for an aspiring ally to get really tactical." She advised that in addition to asking, "What can I do to support you?" you can also ask, "What can I take off your plate?" Bergeron gave specific examples like, "Can I call the caterer?" "Can I book the room?" "Can I print the newsletter?" and "Can I send the calendar invite?" She said that this results in "taking some of that workload toward activation so that those in community can focus on one another, on caring for one another, and still get to the thing that needs to get done."

Bergeron noted that, "Clearing space and time for people in moments where they need to focus their attention on themselves, their families, or their communities, is one of the most important and impactful ways that we can show up for one another one-to-one or ERG-to-ERG."

4. Create space for emotion.

Perhaps the most important thing in a truly difficult time is giving people a safe space where they can be together. This is McCormick's go-to strategy in times of crisis. She said, "For me it's about creating that safe space for the emotion. So, what does that look like? Is it a [smudging ceremony](#) for 15 minutes? Is it just a big, honest Teams meeting where everybody joins and we allow and give space to the ERG that's being affected at that time, time to emote. Right? Sometimes the chair, sometimes members of the ERG have so much to say, you know?"

Conclusion

A crisis is a high-pressure time so it's essential to have a strategy in place to support colleagues before one occurs. Here are some key takeaways:

- Creating a plan before a crisis happens allows employees to be more proactive in the moment.
- Checking in with colleagues in crisis and offering to assist with their workload sets the stage to become an [active ally](#) instead of a well-wisher.
- Creating a space for colleagues to express their feelings will ensure that they have the psychological safety they need.

The allyship journey is ongoing. Catalyst can bring over 60 years of unparalleled expertise, thought leadership, and actionable solutions to your organization. Sign up for our newsletter to receive insights like these directly in your inbox.

Topics: [Allyship And Advocacy](#)

[Employee Resource Groups](#)

[Inclusive Leadership](#)

[Psychological Safety](#)

5 Ways to Strengthen ERGs in the Face of Pushback

Learn from Mita Mallick, Head of Inclusion, Equity and Impact at Carta and Wall Street Journal best-selling author.

7 Key Tips for Executive Sponsors of ERGs

Leaders from Catalyst, Granite Construction, and Rosendin share insights on the importance and impact of executive sponsors on ERGs.

What's Really Causing the DEI Backlash – And How to Fix It

Why do some people misunderstand diversity, equity, and inclusion and falsely assert that it leads to discrimination,

BLOG



April 24, 2024

As part of the Catalyst book review series, Rissa Pappas shines a spotlight on gender inequity in data.

This review is part of the Catalyst staff book review series, in which Catalyst staffers highlight works that deepen our understanding of the experiences of women and members of marginalized communities so that we can build solutions to systemic barriers to equity in our communities and workplaces.

[Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed by Men](#) by Caroline Criado Perez is a wake-up call that women are systematically discriminated against—but that much of the time, we don't even know it. A lack of data about women—our priorities, experiences, even our biology—has consequences that are affecting and will continue to affect us in predictable and unpredictable ways.

Catalyst has long prioritized data collection to support creating workplaces that work for women—most recently with our global quantitative research on women in frontline roles, [Team Dynamics on the Front Line: How Managers and Organizations Impact This Overlooked Key to Retention](#). As Criado Perez maintains, you can't make change unless you have the data showing what needs to be changed in the first place. The good news is that this book shows us the way forward so that we can make change with data and metrics.

Criado Perez demonstrates that there's way more information about women that we don't know than we do know. Regardless of the industry, country, or area of concern, gender data gaps can be ultimately traced back to patriarchal governments and cultures enacting legislation and creating social norms that excluded women.

As for the scant data that does exist, Criado Perez has gathered and organized it in a straightforward way. Each chapter tackles a distinct aspect of women's lives. I found that reading one chapter at a time and then taking a day to digest it helped me to further comprehend and retain the information. There is a lot to consider, but her style is engaging.

The best part of this book is that for women feeling gaslit by society at large, it validates our experiences. Were you told to take some aspirin and go home when you went to the emergency room? Have you found out you [made less](#) than a coworker with the same job and responsibilities? Did you have to choose between working a full-time job to pay for daycare and having no job but still working full-time? Your individual experience may feel isolating and be brushed off as anecdotal. But taken together, the data is illuminating (and a little infuriating).

Anecdotes like “Brigid Jones, a Birmingham City councilor, was told that she would have to step down from her role as cabinet member for *children's services* [italics added] if she became pregnant” may make you particularly angry. You may feel called to do something, to start making positive change in the world for women.

And if you've been gaslit by a world designed to work best for men, you may also feel quite stuck. Where to begin? Where to go? What to do? It can all be overwhelming. Think of this book as a map for changemakers. If you don't already think of yourself as a changemaker, this book will help you see what is possible.

Want to make change at work? Here's what *Invisible Women* teaches:

Metrics matter. If you want to make the case for change, numbers will help prove your case. And if your organization has never [gathered data](#) before on retention or attrition or pay disparity, etc., you now know what to ask for first. [Many companies are embracing pay transparency](#), and are publicly disclosing all sorts of data. Gather examples to show what's possible.

Data is power. Regardless of intentions, biases still permeate the systems and processes humanity has built. Criado Perez cites studies that show when people even think that they are objective and not sexist, you actually become more prone to subjective and sexist behavior. And with new systems including AI being built on top of the same old biased ones, we risk carrying the same problems forward. How do you shake up the status quo? Show those big companies [how much better things could be](#), show employees the [value of their work](#), and show customers how much buying power they have. Biases and assumptions mean much less compared to verified data.

We're stronger together. There's no such thing as a movement of one. The data Criado Perez gathered for *Invisible Women* came from the tireless work of data scientists and changemakers around the world. Check out Catalyst's latest [research](#) to learn more about women at work and be inspired to help change your workplace and workplaces to come.

Topics: [Gender Bias](#)

[Measurement](#)

Must-Read Book on Racism, Colonialism, and Indigenous Life in Canada

“Seven Fallen Feathers” by Tanya Talaga is a powerful exploration of Indigenous life and death.

How to Create Transparency in DEI Measurement: A Guide for Senior Leaders (Infographic)

Organizational transparency around DEI metrics not only creates accountability to customers but can also strengthen the internal focus on DEI.

Beginning a Measurement Process: A Tool for DEI Leaders (Tool)

Whether your organization is just starting its workforce measurement strategy or expanding it, this tool has the resources you need.