

## EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS 101

### INTRODUCTION

At NYS DOL, we understand that New York State's diversity is its greatest strength and most valued resource. But to maximize our potential, we must create an environment where this diversity can thrive. This is why we believe that all New Yorkers deserve to work in a safe and welcoming environment. We recognize how important it is for everyone to have a voice, to feel supported, and to belong to a community of their own. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) represent the next logical step in DOL's commitment to creating an inclusive workplace of diverse communities unified by a culture of acceptance.

### WHAT ARE EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGs)?

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are networks of employees that form based on shared characteristics, cultures, or backgrounds. These groups are voluntary, employer-recognized, and employee-led. ERGs aim to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace where members can build community, discuss meaningful topics in a welcoming setting, and contribute to each other's personal and professional development. The result is a community where employees can feel a sense of belonging and enjoy a greater degree of empowerment in the workplace.

### TYPES OF ERGs

ERGs are formed around shared interests, cultures, or life experiences, so topics are varied. Types of ERGs include the following and many more:

- Gender identities
- Veteran Status
- Disabilities
- Race/ethnicities
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Age
- Family structure

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF AN ERG PROGRAM?

While all ERGs are unique, they should all have a driving purpose, and that purpose should align with organizational values or goals. At NYS DOL, for example, we want to better connect DOL staff from across the agency and across work locations. Some of the most common drivers for ERGs include:

- Creating an open forum for employees who share a common identity to meet and support one another in building community and a sense of belonging.
- Empowering these groups by offering organizational support, mentoring, and professional development, or by providing access to decision-makers.
- Facilitating a clear line of communication with leadership to voice concerns and solve problems.
- Providing leadership with a resource regarding employee and community issues, needs and policies.
- Seeking to advance a respectful and inclusive company culture and reinforce the importance of inclusion.

### WHAT DOES AN ERG LOOK LIKE?

ERGs can take a variety of forms, typically defined by the employees who participate and the organization where they work. At NYS DOL, we will be collecting input from staff to best determine how we can best interact with ERGs to create the kind of communities that will best suit the needs of our staff. While there are any number of directions we can go with this, some popular examples of ERGs include:

- Diversity groups that foster a sense of community among employees that belong to a marginalized communities in the organization
- Volunteer programs where employees can support charities and other volunteer initiatives.
- Affinity clubs where employees with similar interests get an opportunity to socialize
- Professional development groups that provide employees the opportunity to share knowledge with their peers from other departments.