

Benefits of an 2SLGBTQI Employee Resource Group during a time of crisis

1

Feedback

Your ERGs can report on how employees are coping with the new structures that come with COVID-19. By understanding how your employees are adjusting, you can update your policies to meet their needs, such as balancing childcare/elder care with work schedules.

2

Mutual support in hard times - a queer legacy

Building and sustaining community networks across physical distance is a well-known challenge for 2SLGBTQI people. In this uncertain and disorienting time, we can find strength in remembering that queer and trans people have a long demonstrated great resourcefulness and community. Many 2SLGBTQI people have shared the hardship of not being able to connect in physical spaces in a safe way. It is important to learn from and to continue this legacy of mutual support and community care.

3

Now is the time to leverage existing communities of care

Although not all things can or should simply carry on as if business is usual, there is an opportunity now to leverage existing communities of care. Your qualified and passionate employees can be mobilized to share their collective energy to help everyone cope during this stressful pandemic. An ERG can be an immeasurably valuable resource in response to emerging individual and collective needs and vulnerabilities. Better coping strategies will lead to a better chance at meeting business goals.

4

Added stressors are especially unbearable to those already struggling

2SLGBTQI employees may already have been dealing with emotional and psychological stressors at a greater rate than their heterosexual and/or cisgender peers. Under these new circumstances, we have found that the 2SLGBTQI community has taken a much bigger toll on their physical and mental health, compared to their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts. Your ERG will serve to combat all these compounding factors. [Learn more about the impacts of COVID-19 on the 2SLGBTQI community.](#)

At the best of times, ERGs hold the possibility of offering some respite by providing a sense of belonging, community and shared resources. It is now more important than ever to let your employees know that you support them outside of business-as-usual practices!

Tips for Facilitating Online Employee Resource Groups

Establish Safer Space Ground Rules Through A Collective Process:

The goal of any ERG is to create spaces that allow your employees to share and encourage one another but including everyone means conflicts are bound to arise – it's how we navigate those differing interests that matters. Collective ground rules help create conditions that allow participants to engage with one another as comfortably and safely as possible. This is as important as for online meetings as they are for physical meetings. By facilitating a collective process where participants can name and agree to a set of ground rules, everyone is held accountable to uphold a safer space. This might include discussing things like, 'avoid assumptions about the gender or attraction identity of anyone in the group', and 'being mindful not to interrupt anyone'.

While many of the same ground rules you have already established for your physical ERG meetings will still apply, it is a good idea to revisit them to see if they work for an online environment. From there you can collectively make any necessary additions to adapt to the new context. Additional measures to protect the privacy and safety of your participants might be needed as not everyone will be joining from an environment in which it is safe for them to be out.

Use screen sharing technology or collaborative documents to compose the list of ground rules together and adjust them with input from the group until there is consensus. Save the document in a shared location. See the last section for an example set of collective ground rules.

Be Sensitive to Privacy:

Remember that participants may not use the same name and pronoun that they use in the general office space. Remind participants to change their screen name to display the name and pronoun they wish to be referred to in this space and do a check-in about pronouns ahead of time.

Make Participation Optional and Low Pressure:

Do not expect the same level of attendance in your online meetings compared to your in-person ERG. Recognize that this is an exceptionally challenging time for many and trust that your peers are doing their best to take care of their own needs in this new context. Adding pressure to participate will likely be unhelpful at this time, but extra compassion will go a long way. Rather than indicating high expectations for participation, some may appreciate a check-in or a gentle, no-obligation reminder about the opportunity to join in online. You must develop new ways to "read the room". Consider planning activities for each meeting, rather than longer projects requiring multiple meetings to complete. Check out some activity ideas in the next resource!

Moderate Conversation with Digital Tools:

There are some added challenges to working within an online environment. You want to keep the conversation flowing as organically as possible while minimizing interruptions. At the same time, you also want to give everyone the opportunity to contribute. Make use of tools in the videoconferencing technology you are using. Instead of a "talking stick", ask participants who are not currently speaking to mute their microphone. Ask participants to use the digital "hand-raise" feature to ask for the floor to speak. Remember to moderate the chat feature so that the contributions there are not ignored. Remind participants of the ground rule to "share the air" if conversational space is feeling off balance.

Trouble Shooting Spotty Tech:

Spotty internet connections, delays, or freezing can be frustrating parts of meetings. Consider limiting the number of people with video display on at one time as this may help with the connection overall. Have a back-up option to keep communication flowing in case of tech issues. Take the initiative to speak up to inform the group on behalf of a person who may have lost their connection. Keep a group chat going elsewhere on a predetermined platform that everyone has access to. Keep in mind that some videoconferencing apps require paid subscriptions and that sessions on free version may time out. Keep everyone informed when new sessions will start.



Create a virtual “caremongering” group

Follow the new Canadian trend of “[CareMongering](#)”; a movement to spread community and camaraderie in the face of uncertainty and fear. Your ERG should have a dedicated group chat area to share care, volunteer resources, and information. Group chats are an efficient way to centralize all resources that your employees come across in their personal lives.



Attend a virtual work lunch together

A great way to keep your ERG engaged is scheduling virtual lunches together. This will ease some isolation and allow employees who do not work closely together on projects to stay in touch. By encouraging employees to interact even if it is not work related will foster and maintain a work culture geared towards inclusion and care.



Recognize a Queer Event of Significance

You can virtually celebrate 2SLGBTQI related days at home. There are tons of events happening all the time. Follow us on social media [@EgaleCanada](#) or [sign up for our bi-weekly newsletter](#) to get the latest information on upcoming events, days of significance and more.



Share your enthusiasm!

Share a photo, video or story about how your ERG is showing your pride during the COVID-19 pandemic, tag [@egalecanada](#) and use the hashtag [#PrideInside2020](#)



Virtual workouts

Physical health can be difficult during this time, especially if employees don't have a proper home office or fitness equipment. An ERG can encourage and organize group participation in a virtual work out. [Check out these tips](#) on how to keep up movements at home, maybe even do the 2SLGBTQI movement routine together!



Organize Action

For ERG members who are interested in activism, a great number of non-profit organizations are looking for help! A lot of appreciation goes to tasks ranging from (but not limited to) sharing call-to-actions, organizing fundraisers, or volunteering expert skill sets. For example, Egale is looking for additional signal boosts to the following surveys:

- [Second National Survey on Inclusion in Canadian Secondary Schools](#)
- [Speak OUT national survey on 2SLGBTQI youth dating violence](#)

Please make sure to check our [website](#) and [social media](#) to see other research projects that require community participation. *Thank you for championing important research!*

Egale Collective Ground Rules for an Employee Resource Group

To create a safer space for everyone involved, it is important to create a set of collective ground rules for everyone to follow. Here are some examples of collective ground rules to foster a safer space.

RESPECT

Address one another with dignity, respect and maintain an openness to learn from and about one another.

SELF-CARE

Do what you need to do to take care of your own physical and emotional needs, while maintaining respect and safety for others.

I-STATEMENTS

Do not make generalizing statements or assumptions about others; speak only from your own experience and perspective.

CONSENT

Do not pressure anyone to participate via video. Not everyone will be comfortable with this and everyone is entitled to their privacy. Everything should be optional and make sure to give content warnings before launching into any sensitive topics.

ACCOUNTABILITY

If you harm someone, even if it is unintentional, be willing to apologize authentically, listen, and learn to change your behaviour.

STEP-UP, STEP BACK

Be aware of the amount of space you take up. Allow all group members adequate space to contribute and be mindful not to interrupt one another.

ASSUMPTIONS

Do not assume the gender or attraction identity of anyone in the group. Share your own pronouns and ask for others' pronouns before assuming. When discussing someone whose pronouns you are unsure of, use they/them pronouns. Respect the name and pronouns that folks report. A reminder that these names and pronouns may be different to the ones they use with other staff and in other office spaces.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Unless you have the expressed consent of the group member, anything shared within the group is entitled to confidentiality. Do not share another member's personal experiences outside of the group.