

Establishing remote employee resource groups

“Affinity groups are a useful medium to foster inclusion and cohesion among employees that would otherwise never meet. As they are mainly employee-led, their emergence must come from an identified need for connection and sharing.



The importance of affinity groups in hybrid and remote work (HRW)

Affinity groups, or employee resource groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led communities that bring together individuals with shared characteristics, interests or life experiences. These may relate to race, gender, LGBTQ+ identity, disability, neurodiversity, caregiving responsibilities...

In hybrid and remote work settings, affinity groups can play a critical role in **fostering inclusion, reducing isolation and enhancing a sense of belonging**, particularly for underrepresented or marginalised employees who may otherwise feel disconnected from the organisation or team culture.

Thanks to regularly scheduled meetings, affinity groups provide **connection and solidarity**. The tone is generally more informal formats than other work-related projects and meetings and it may be easier for **underrepresented voices to express themselves**.

Establishing remote **affinity** groups

In hybrid and remote work (HRW), the absence of physical presence can lead to slower decision-making processes, miscommunication, and feelings of isolation. As a result, having clear problem-solving frameworks becomes essential for overcoming these barriers.

Structured problem-solving frameworks give teams a clear methodology to follow, which is especially important when collaboration spans across different time zones and work styles. These frameworks allow teams to break down complex problems into manageable steps, assign tasks efficiently, and track progress effectively, whether working synchronously or asynchronously.

Rituals, such as daily stand-ups, weekly retrospectives, and scheduled brainstorming sessions, provide consistent touchpoints for teams to share updates, identify challenges, and create solutions together. These rituals promote transparency, encourage participation from all team members, and create a sense of routine and predictability that helps remote teams feel more connected, with a shared understanding of goals and processes.

Key **principles of success**

- 1 Clear purpose and scope:** Each group should have a defined purpose or mission, and clear objectives aligned with the organisation's broader inclusion and diversity strategy
- 2 Voluntary participation:** Affinity groups rely on the active and voluntary participation of its members. They can be opened to allies of the represented identity or group
- 3 Executive sponsorship:** Secure visible support from senior leaders who can champion the group's purpose, advocate for its needs, and help remove systemic barriers
- 4 Equitable access:** Use digital tools that are accessible and easy to use, and schedule meetings or events at varied times
- 5 Confidentiality and psychological safety:** Ensure ground rules are in place to create respectful, supportive and inclusive spaces
- 6 HR and management collaboration:** Provide administrative support through HR or diversity and inclusion teams

Getting started

- Begin with one or two groups based on interest and demand
- Provide a simple charter template to help group founders articulate purpose, membership guidelines and key goals
- Publicise the group internally and make it easy for remote employees to join
- Ensure the group has a dedicated communication channel
- Check in regularly to understand the group's evolving needs

Remote affinity groups can be powerful drivers of inclusion and cohesion in hybrid and remote settings. By providing intentional spaces for connection, shared identity and mutual support, they help create a workplace where everyone can thrive, no matter where they are located.



References

- Canadian Center for Diversity and Inclusion - Toolkit for creating and sustaining effective ERGs <https://ccdi.ca/media/4177/ccdi-toolkit-employee-resource-groups-a-toolkit-for-creating-and-sustaining-effective-ergs.pdf>