



## Disability Employee Resource Groups

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**MOST COMPANIES TODAY** have what is known as employee resource or affinity groups. ERGs can be a tremendous asset for a company as long as they are seen as a group that connects directly to business goals and objec-

tives and not a corporate sponsored support group. Historically, these groups were organized by gender, race or culture but as the make-up of the workforce changes, so does the need for other types of ERGs such as those for employees with a disability or who have a dependent with special needs.

Although ERGs are generally initiated by employees, often employees with disabilities, especially invisible disabilities, are reluctant to ask their employer to launch such a group. This is typically due to a fear of repercussions related to self-disclosure and especially so if there isn't company support for this employee segment. As a result, a company may believe there's either no interest in starting such a group or no need, considering the small number of employees who have a disability.

Because of this, the employer may need to assist with the promotion and launch of such a group. A disability ERG can serve as a strategic partner that contributes to the organization's success and profitability.

Of course, it is important to remember that this segment of the employee population is really four distinct segments: employees who are born with or who have acquired a disability, maturing employees with age-related disabilities, veterans with service-related disabilities, and employees who have a child with special needs.

Some companies have one Disability ERG to serve all four segments, others have multiple groups. It's

critical that the mission, vision, objectives and even the name of the group reflect the intended audience and outcomes.

Here are a few of the ways these groups support their companies' business objectives:

- Review policies and business processes that affect people with disabilities.
- Identify marketing opportunities for products and services tailored to people with disabilities.
- Drive internal visibility of these employees from the standpoint of career development and progression.
- Collaborate with internal teams on accessibility issues, from technology to physical space and overall work environment.
- Raise awareness of workplace issues that affect people with disabilities.
- Assist in the on-boarding of new employees with disabilities.

So, does a company need to have an employee resource group for people with disabilities? Only if that company truly wants to successfully integrate disability into their corporate culture. Want to learn more about successfully starting a Disability ERG and/or growing an existing one? Contact Springboard Consulting LLC at 973-813-7260 x102 or email us at [info@consultspringboard.com](mailto:info@consultspringboard.com) for on-site disability ERG strategy sessions, toolkits and more. **PDJ**

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*Nadine Vogel is President of Springboard Consulting LLC. Springboard ([www.consultspringboard.com](http://www.consultspringboard.com)) is considered a global expert; working with corporations, governments and organizations on issues pertaining to supporting the disability community in the workforce, workplace and marketplace. She is also the author of DIVE IN: Springboard into the Profitability, Productivity and Potential of the Special Needs Workforce.*