

GUIDE

# Engaging Frontline Workers in ERGs

How ERGs Can Be a Gateway to Engagement and Career Advancement for Frontline Talent

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Communications Handbook

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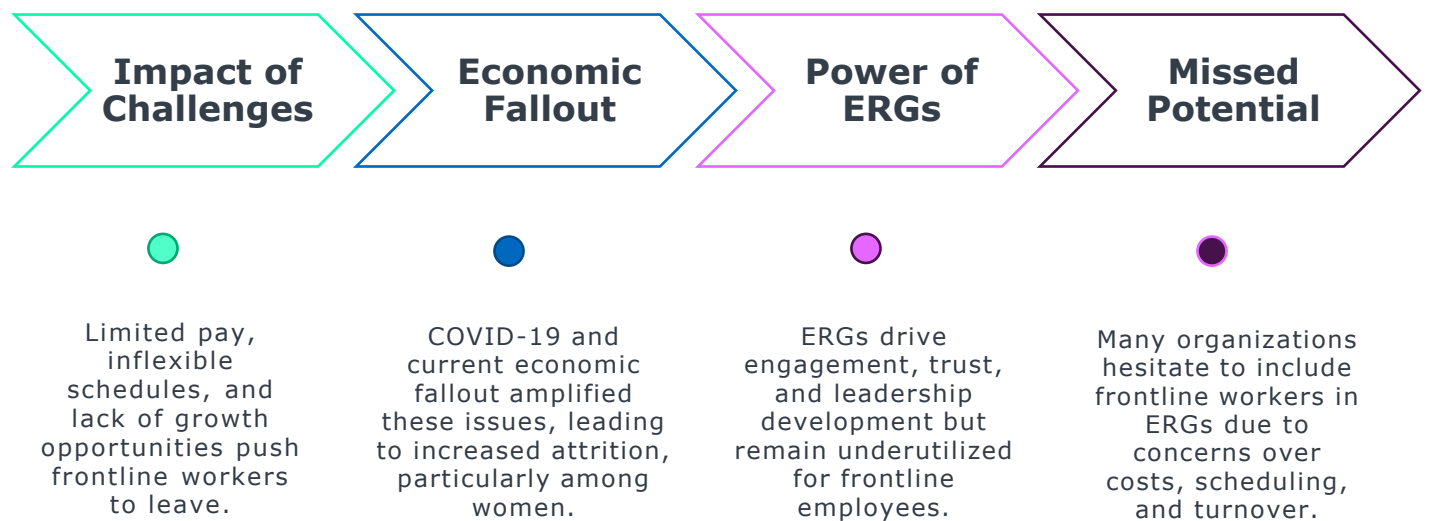
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# Empowering the Backbone of Your Workforce

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics there were 7.4 million job openings in October 2024<sup>1</sup>. The race to attract, retain, and develop talent has reached unprecedented urgency, particularly among frontline workers who engage directly with the public in sectors such as healthcare, retail, utilities, and manufacturing. Historically, these workers have faced challenges like low pay, inflexible schedules, and limited growth opportunities, leading many to seek alternative careers. The COVID-19 pandemic and economic fallout further exacerbated these issues, with many frontline workers—especially women—leaving the workforce due to childcare demands or an aversion to shift-based roles.

Despite these challenges, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) have emerged as a game-changer, boosting engagement, trust, and leadership development. However, many companies overlook the potential of ERGs for frontline workers, citing concerns about overtime costs, scheduling conflicts, and high turnover rates.

## Key Insights on Supporting Frontline



1:<https://www.bls.gov/jlt/>

# Five Strategies to Improve Frontline Worker Engagement

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Retaining frontline employees is paramount, and ERGs may be a useful tool to help do so. **Here are five strategies may be of value to help acclimate this workforce to ERG participation:**

## 1

### **Involving Union Members in ERGs**

- Collaborate with unions to emphasize ERG benefits and address concerns over payment.
- Advocate for individual workers' participation, addressing concerns with union leaders.

## 2

### **Creating a Successful Communications Strategy to Frontline Workers**

- Develop a communications plan for all employees to access the corporate Intranet, regardless of official company emails.
- Implementing inclusive online content and technology to keep frontline workers informed

## 3

### **Allowing Frontline Workers to Hold ERG Leadership Positions**

- Educate managers about the organizational value of ERGs, emphasizing their role in employee development, engagement, and retention.
- Highlight ERG leadership as a positive factor in performance evaluations, shifting focus from compensation or benefits that may be perceived as unfair.

## 4

### **Engaging a Transitory Workforce in ERGs**

- Provide access to in-store computers and virtual links, enabling frontline employees to engage and view ERG content during their available "down" time at work.
- Incorporate frontline employees into the organization's employee engagement surveys, which are currently excluding them.

## 5

### **Utilizing ERGs for Recruitment, Retention and Leadership Development**

- Find new talent through ERG referrals.
- Use ERGs to communicate with and survey frontline workers on their specific needs and ideas for the company.

# 1

## Involving Union Members in ERGs

Payment and union compliance are key concerns and union rules on compensation can hinder frontline workers' ERG involvement. There can also be challenges in union negotiations due to workplace issues such as inadequate breaks, uncomfortable temperatures, and penalties for late arrival due to unreliable transportation.

### Solutions



**Collaborate with Unions:** Showcase how ERGs improve understanding of benefits, like LGBTQ+ advocacy or Black employees fostering trust post-George Floyd.



**Enable ERG Participation:** Allow virtual or workday involvement without overtime, benefiting both employees and organizations.



**Showcase Success:** Highlight frontline workers' increased engagement, retention, and promotions through ERG involvement.

# 2

## Creating a Successful Communications Strategy to Frontline Workers

Strict communication guidelines can pose challenges for engaging front-line workers in ERGs. Limited by lacking company email addresses or access to software, they face difficulty participating or becoming official members.

### Solutions



**Accessible Communications:** Create a plan to give all employees, even without company emails, access to ERG content via the corporate intranet or printed materials.



**On-Site Inclusion:** Set up workstations so employees can view ERG activities during breaks or lunch.



**Mobile Solutions:** Develop or collaborate with apps that allow frontline workers to engage in ERGs using personal phones without needing a company email.

### Building Support for ERG Participation through Individual Conversations with Shop Stewards

According to another DEI leader at a manufacturing company, it is advisable to engage in individual conversations with shop stewards, presenting a case for granting specific individuals extra time and flexibility to participate. The DEI leader shared an example where an employee expressed aspirations for leadership, demonstrating their long-standing dedication to the organization. By demonstrating the deserving nature of this opportunity to the union leader, an agreement was reached. Additionally, the employee's team lead was willing to provide coverage whenever necessary.

# 3 Allowing Frontline Workers to Hold ERG Leadership Positions

Allowing frontline workers, including those who are unionized, to assume leadership positions in ERGs can significantly enhance their engagement. While a manufacturer/distributor permits frontline workers to join ERGs, the exclusion from leadership roles, which demand additional time and commitment, limits their full involvement.

## Implementation



**Allocate Time for ERGs:** Empower managers to prioritize time for employees to engage in ERG activities while balancing job responsibilities.



**Educate Managers:** Highlight the value of ERGs in driving development, engagement, and retention.



**Recognize Leadership:** Include ERG leadership as a positive factor in performance evaluations.



**Inclusive Representation:** Ensure ERGs include both corporate leaders and frontline leaders to boost engagement and address concerns.

# 4 Engaging a Transitory Workforce in ERGs

Companies can face the challenge of engaging and including its predominantly lower-wage, short-tenured workforce in ERG activities to develop and retain front-line talent effectively. This requires innovative approaches and tailored strategies to ensure that these employees feel valued, supported, and included in the organization's DEI initiatives.

## Strategies



**Facilitate Participation:** Provide access to ERG activities during downtime through in-store computers and virtual links, with manager support.



**Gather Feedback:** Include frontline workers in engagement surveys to understand their challenges and needs.



**Boost Retention:** Leverage survey insights to address turnover factors and improve employee experiences and growth opportunities.

### What is a Transitory Workforce?

A transitory workforce refers to a group of employees who have a high turnover rate or shorter job tenures within an organization. These individuals may be characterized by frequent job changes, temporary or seasonal employment, or a higher likelihood of transitioning between different companies or industries.

# 5 Utilizing ERGs for Recruitment, Retention and Leadership Development

In the quest for talent, particularly underrepresented individuals who champion DEI in the workplace, companies are facing unprecedented challenges. Compounded by various manifestations of [employee disengagement](#) such as communication breakdowns, lack of teamwork, inconsistent punctuality, and limited career aspirations, organizations are seeking effective solutions. Leveraging the power of ERGs can serve as a dual strategy: scouting and attracting new talent while also nurturing and retaining existing talent, fostering a thriving and inclusive work environment.

## Strategies & Results



**Engage Hourly Workers:** Focus on integrating hourly, short-tenured employees into ERG activities to foster their development and retention.



**Customizable Strategies:** Adopt customized or industry-specific approaches that prioritize inclusion, support, and recognition within broader DEI efforts.



**Address Communication Gaps:** Improve access to communication channels like email, e-newsletters, and social intranets for frontline workers.



**Reduce Turnover:** Bridge the disconnect that contributes to high turnover rates in industries employing frontline workers



**Boost Engagement Through ERGs:** Leverage ERG membership to enhance employee engagement, retention, and leadership development.

### Empowering Frontline Employees Example

According to a DEI leader at a retail company, establishing a DEI council with 18 employees, including 9 frontline workers, has proven effective. These individuals meet monthly during company hours to address DEI challenges and propose solutions across stores, serving as Inclusion Ambassadors. Managers have supported this initiative by recognizing participation as an opportunity for leadership development and ensuring time flexibility. Notably, of the initial 9 frontline employees involved, 4 have already been promoted, highlighting the program's success in fostering growth and recognition.

## What's the Key Takeaway?

Organizations can use ERGs as a means to effectively communicate with and survey frontline workers, allowing them to express their specific needs and ideas for the company. This approach provides them with exposure to corporate and senior leaders, granting them a voice within the organization. By [valuing and considering their opinions](#), companies can strengthen retention and foster a sense of involvement. It is important for management to provide transparent explanations when ideas are not implemented, creating a feedback loop that encourages further contributions from employees.

## Next Steps

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By prioritizing the inclusion of frontline workers in ERG initiatives, organizations can address longstanding challenges such as communication gaps, disengagement, and retention issues. Tailored strategies—like collaborating with unions, improving access to ERG activities, and creating leadership opportunities—empower frontline employees to contribute meaningfully and develop professionally.

When implemented effectively, ERGs serve as a catalyst for engagement, trust, and growth, providing frontline workers with a voice while driving organizational success. Companies that invest in these approaches not only strengthen employee morale and loyalty but also position themselves to create a more inclusive, resilient, and thriving workforce.

**Contact Seramount** to learn how we can help your ERGs maximize their potential and create lasting impact in your organization.

## Explore More Resources

### Employee Group Maturity Model



Elevate your ERGs with our structured framework. From culture to business impact, shape the future of your employee groups.

[Explore the model.](#)

### ERG Leader Certification



Join a global network of ERG leaders. Share best practices, tackle challenges, and drive your organization's DEI strategy forward.

[Start the journey.](#)

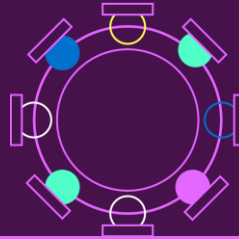
### ERGs at the Crossroad: Benefits, Boundaries, and Burnout



ERGs are surging, but so is leader burnout. Discover how to navigate this critical juncture and unlock your ERGs' full potential.

[Read the insights.](#)





## Insight-Powered Solutions Trusted by Talent and HR Leaders

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