

Toolkit for Creating a Christian Employee Resource Group The 5 P's of Implementation

Over the years, many companies have been reluctant to approve religious activities occurring in their workplace due to legal concerns or fear of complaints from other employees. However, today the importance of Diversity and Inclusion efforts within organizations has opened the door to a new dialogue about the acceptance of faith-based initiatives in the workplace. Specifically, most D&I professionals espouse the idea that employees should be able to bring their whole selves to work. Faith is a critical identity for many individuals and, therefore, these employees will not feel as if they truly belong and are included in their workplace until they feel that their faith is respected at work.

In order to effectively engage in a dialogue with your D&I, Human Resources and/or legal teams and then create a business case and application, we have included below potential action steps you might consider in pursuing approval of a formal Christian Employee Resource Group (CERG). Many of these steps would also be effective in gaining approval for an informal Christian group, Bible study, prayer group or similar gathering. We've called them the 5 P's which are Prayer, Policy, Purpose, Peace and Programming.

I. Prayer

We would be remiss if we did not encourage you to begin this effort with prayer. God is on the move all around us in ways we cannot fathom or comprehend, and He is most certainly already at work in your organization. We can only hope to join Him in the work He is already doing. We cannot create a group of our own design or making. Such an effort will certainly fail. *Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.* Psalm 127:1. But if you prepare yourself for Kingdom work in your organization by sustained prayer, alone or with others, God will show you where the opportunity exists. After a time, ask yourself what you feel God prompting you to do, who is He urging you to include in this work, where is He directing you to look for resources.

All of the steps below are subject to change based on God's will and His leading in your particular situation. We are human, and we often get out ahead of God's plan or take a wrong turn when we are proceeding with our own agenda. Wait expectantly for God to clarify His desire for you, and then follow His will obediently. We can also tell you from personal experience that sometimes when it seems like nothing is happening, God is working behind the scenes, moving the right people into position in order to facilitate the creation of a CERG. You may feel like you're in a holding pattern and wondering why you don't feel any traction. But stay in prayer and keep pressing forward. God's timing is perfect, and you will be amazed to see all of the pieces fit together at a later point and reveal what He was doing and why you needed to wait in hope.

II. Policy

A necessary step will be to review your organization's policy for the creation of ERGs. Many organizations have an application and approval policy that must be followed. Often the policy also details the criteria for approval and indicates which types of groups or initiatives will not be permitted. Have a thorough understanding of this policy and extract the explicit language regarding the criteria for approval.

For example, many policies will provide that an ERG must be open to all employees, support a business purpose, and exist to support development and networking for employees. In the D&I area, it is often said that ERGs should fulfill the 4 C's which are Culture, Communications, Commerce and Careers.¹ More specifically, ERGs should help to improve the **culture** of the organization through education and awareness raising for employees who are not members of that ERG. They should enhance the company brand, create opportunities for collaboration between the company and external groups, and overall help **communications** strategies of the company. ERGs can also provide support in the area of **commerce** in terms of providing consumer/buyer insight or assist the company to penetrate into new markets. Finally, an ERG should provide professional development for its members, raise visibility of members within the organization and serve to facilitate **career** advancement for employees.

I regularly hear D&I professionals question how a faith-based ERG could fulfill the 4 C's. The assumption is that faith-based ERGs will simply be gathering for prayer time or a Bible study. Therefore, the D&I professional concludes that they will not be engaged in activities that support the business strategy of the organization in alignment with the 4C model. But that is an immense under-estimation of the work of CERGs.

In the sections that follow, we will provide examples of ways in which CERGs can support the 4C model and support the company's strategy and purpose. But it is critical that you keep the specific criteria from your company policy central to your work. As you prepare application materials, a mission, vision or programming, you will want to continue to return to the particular language in your company policy.

Another question that you will likely receive from your HR or D&I team is why you would pursue a Christian ERG, rather than an Interfaith ERG. Frequently, companies will prefer to encourage an Interfaith group, if they are open to a faith-based ERG at all. The company policy can also be important in this respect. Some company policies governing ERGs provide that ERGs are formed through a grass-roots effort of employees who share a common affinity and come together in order to form a group. If that is the case, then the company itself should not propose to form an Interfaith group. Rather, according to such a policy, the company would simply respond to the groups of employees who come forward and apply. If the Christian employees

¹ The 4C Model was first introduced in 2006 by Dr. Robert Rodriguez of DRR Advisors LLC.

are the only employees who have gathered together in order to form an ERG, then the policy would suggest that the company has an obligation to consider that application.

Also, if the purpose of the company's ERGs is to permit employees who share the same affinity to gather together, then forcing the Christian employees to ONLY participate in an Interfaith group would be denying them the ability to gather with others who share their beliefs. While interfaith dialogue can be very valuable and is certainly recommended (as discussed later), an Interfaith ERG without allowance for ERGs based on specific faiths does not sufficiently fulfill the purpose of ERGs generally and the philosophy of D&I. Telling Christian employees that they can only gather together in an Interfaith ERG would be similar to telling all people of color that they can only gather together in a People of Color ERG. Employees would be certain to object to such an approach, saying that the benefit of an ERG is the ability to gather with others who share the same culture and heritage so that the groups resulting are an African American ERG, Latino ERG, Asian American ERG and the like. The central belief that Christians share is Jesus, and if the ERG cannot talk about Jesus, then it does not truly offer employees an opportunity to create a community based on a shared affinity.

Nevertheless, if your company is very reluctant to approve a CERG because of concerns that other faith groups will feel alienated by that decision, you can offer to facilitate a connection or network between faith-based ERGs if employees of other faiths express interest in forming a group. This could result in an Interfaith umbrella over all faith-based ERGs or a council of leaders from all faith-based ERGs that plans joint events or discusses common issues. Some examples of practical steps in this regard are included in the sections below.

III. Purpose

The 4C model provides a good starting point for developing the purpose, mission and vision for your CERG. Many of these goals will relate directly to the programming you choose to pursue, which we will discuss later. Because faith-based ERGs are still seen as uncommon, it is important to show that there is truly a connection to the strategy of the business and the values of your company. The ability for employees to bring their whole selves to work is an important component that should feature prominently in your materials. Further, in addition to the 4 C's, we have included a list below with some other ideas for you to consider with respect to your organization's purpose, mission and vision.

Attraction of talent: All HR departments would like assistance in attracting highly qualified candidates to your company. If your CERG can network with individuals at other companies; with Christian colleges, nonprofits, churches and other ministries; with underserved populations in high school or college; and generally be an ambassador for your company in your local community, then this will assist your organization with recruiting efforts. Some may question whether this will result in too many Christians in the organization and a lack of diversity. However, all company ERGs are normally given the same goal to impact recruitment efforts. If

all ERGs are working diligently toward that goal, then the CERG will not be the only ERG that is recruiting new hires.

Engagement of employees: Building a sense of community and belonging among your employees is important to improving the company culture and retaining talented employees. Recognizing that faith is important to your people is the first step to creating true inclusion. Providing opportunities for your employees to gather with individuals who share their faith beliefs gives them a sense of community within your organization. Also teaching employees about the integration of faith and work helps them to see work from a different perspective that can lead to longer term engagement.

Increased work performance: When you study the theology of work as described in books like Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavor* or Tom Nelson's *Work Matters to God*, you gain a new appreciation for God's expectations for our work. You then view your work as an opportunity to bring glory to God. You realize that God created you for a purpose, and He has placed you in your particular job for a reason. As we educate employees about these ideas through a CERG, we encourage everyone to pursue excellence in their work so that they are reaching the full potential God intended for them.

Development: Every company is looking for ways to enhance opportunities for employees to develop, and employees want to feel that the company is investing in their growth. A CERG can provide leadership opportunities for employees, as all ERGs can do. But CERGs have an even greater responsibility to facilitate learning and growth in light of our Christian beliefs and the idea that we are all *being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory*.² The CERG can encourage innovative thinking, foster creativity, and provide opportunities for more self awareness. Methods for focusing on development could include hosting well-recognized leadership simulcast events (such as the Global Leadership Summit, Leadercast, Workmatters Conference, etc.), hosting other speakers, presentations on servant leadership, or sponsoring employee attendance at Christian leadership conferences.

Here is a sample mission statement that tries to include all of these components as well as the 4 C's:

The mission of the CERG is to create and foster a multi-denominational Christian support structure to encourage all employees to bring their whole selves to work in order to achieve success and satisfaction in their professional lives and to contribute positively to the organization. This will be accomplished through networking and connection; leadership opportunities and development; and community service. Specifically, we will work to recruit and attract talent. Our programs will focus on efforts to retain and engage existing employees. Our work will be designed to improve the company's service to our customers, our collaboration and

² 2 Corinthians 3:18.

compassion toward our colleagues, the development and performance of our employees, and contributions toward the communities where we live and work.

IV. Peace

A common concern raised by HR departments regarding the application of a CERG is that the group will cause division and disruption in the company. There is a concern that employees who hold different religious beliefs will feel alienated by the creation of a Christian group. There is sometimes an assumption that the Christian group has been formed in order to oppose the LGBT group. Unfortunately, in our culture today, many people assume the worst about Christians. The CERG can be an opportunity for us to change that perception. A CERG can be a group that brings peace to the organization and truly shines a light in the darkness.

Because there are often misconceptions about the reason a CERG is being formed or what the employees will be doing in meetings, it can be helpful to establish the pillars of your group and share those publicly. The pillars are a quick way for the leadership of the company and all employees to understand the focus of your CERG and the connection to the business. For those who are concerned that the group is simply a Bible study and should not be a formal ERG, a set of pillars can overcome those concerns and demonstrate that there is true business value. For others who believe that a CERG will cause division, the pillars show that there are many beliefs that all Christians can agree upon regardless of their denomination.

Once you are approved, it's a good idea to present the pillars to the leaders of the other ERGs and to frequently refer to them in your meetings and when planning programming. The pillars below are just an example.

Love
Integrity
Excellence
Inclusion
Growth
Connection
Leadership
Service

To elaborate on these concepts, **Love** can refer to loving our neighbors -- this can include colleagues, customers, vendors, etc. Every company wants to foster ethical behavior and **Integrity**, which is consistent with our Christian beliefs. We've discussed **Excellence** and that strong performance is actually fulfilling God's desire for our work. **Inclusion** is very important to every organization and may be explicitly mentioned in the company's strategy or purpose. As Christians, we believe that every human being is made in God's image and should be treated with dignity and respect. We've also talked about **Growth**. Education is a common purpose of all ERGs and in the case of a CERG, that could include the theology of work, faith and work

integration, wellness and balance. **Connection** and community is a primary purpose of all ERGs, and CERGs can further provide a support structure that includes prayer and small groups. As mentioned previously, all organizations want to develop **Leadership** skills and prepare future leaders. Finally, **Service** and community outreach is a critical component of our Christian lives and a method for the CERG to help others and build the company's reputation in the community.

In addition to the pillars, there is another method that can be used to alleviate concerns. Some will comment that religion is a polarizing topic and will be fearful that a CERG will cause division in the organization. You can reassure your HR and D&I leadership, make your legal team more comfortable, and facilitate the relationships with other ERGs by establishing a set of guidelines that are included in your application and shared with the other ERGs and your members. The guidelines govern how the CERG will conduct its operations, but they also communicate the expectations for employees and how employees should discuss religious topics in a respectful, positive manner. While we hope and believe that few, if any, Christians working in companies today need to be reminded of these concepts, implementing such guidelines goes a long way in addressing the objections of HR and legal departments. A sample set of guidelines is included below:

GUIDELINES

Open. The ERG is open to all employees.

Respect. Employees will connect the teachings of Jesus Christ to work-related topics but will be respectful of comments by employees regarding other beliefs, and sensitive to varying perspectives.

Positive. Employees will focus on subjects that are positive, uplifting and supportive and will not disparage any group, religion, characteristic or belief.

Interfaith. The ERG will welcome the opportunity to mentor other employees who want to form an ERG based on another religious tradition and will participate in an Interfaith Council as other faith-based ERGs are formed.

Support. The ERG will support and work with all existing ERGs at the company and will not have a purpose that opposes another ERG.

V. Programming

The programming of your CERG will absolutely be specific to your organization, but there are some programming ideas which can be helpful in you fulfilling your mission and purpose as well as facilitating peace within the organization and with other ERGs. For example, if your D&I leadership expresses interest in forming an Interfaith group and is reluctant to approve a Christian ERG, you can work to address those concerns by committing that the CERG will perform certain actions. Specifically, the CERG can help spread the message that other faith-based ERGs are welcome to form. You can offer to mentor and assist them and participate in an Interfaith council or network, as reflected in the guidelines. The D&I team can

communicate the invitation to other employees through intranet articles or newsletters to employees. Indeed, the D&I team can use it as an opportunity to address religious diversity more broadly and invite employees to form other faith-based ERGs to work alongside the CERG. The CERG can also host an Interfaith panel event that is co-sponsored by another ERG, such as the Asian American ERG, in order to create an environment where employees know that the company and the CERG members are supportive and respectful of employees who hold other religious beliefs and will even assist them to form a formal ERG, if they wish.

It's also important to show that you will work with all of the other ERGs. By way of example, collaborating with groups that may not seem like-minded, such as an LGBT group, may help to demonstrate this. You could plan a service project with the LGBT ERG to do a food drive together or something similar which shows employees that the two groups are not at odds. Some people will also assume that the Christian group might be "filled with white males who didn't fit within any of the other ERGs." It's critical that the CERG attract a diverse group of members and leaders and that the programming of the CERG demonstrates clearly the CERG's commitment to equality and diversity. For instance, co-sponsoring an event with the African American ERG on Martin Luther King, Jr. day or during Black History Month will be a very effective partnership. The reading of one of Dr. King's speeches or an event involving a gospel choir will appeal to members of both ERGs and be educational and uplifting.

The most impactful events from a business perspective will have an emphasis on customers. Can your ERG members provide insights to the business regarding a particular customer segment? Could you host a panel of customers who will talk about how their faith impacts the management of their business? Are there Christian business and industry groups that your CERG could join in order to build connections in the market? These are important components which show that your CERG is addressing the Commerce aspect of the 4 C's.

It's also beneficial to consider the format of your events. If your company provides you with access to an auditorium or conference room with video conferencing capabilities to other offices, this can be a great way to connect with individuals across the country and perhaps the world. On the other hand, the sense of community may be best developed through small groups, prayer meetings and opportunities for more intimate gatherings and fellowship. It's helpful to offer both types of events so that you are facilitating the broader connection across the entire organization but also encouraging fellowship. Additionally, some organizations have an internal social media platform which allows for the creation of a group page. ERGs are now creating their own pages on such sites, which allows for more frequent interaction between the members. This can be a powerful tool for a CERG when members are posting scriptures daily and encouraging each other regularly.

VI. Conclusion

We hope this has been helpful to you to provide a framework for developing your approach and your application. Again, every organization is unique and, therefore, you will certainly have to

adapt these suggestions to your particular environment. But the items above reflect typical HR and legal considerations that will be important for you to review. We are praying for everyone who receives this material, praying that God will lead you in this work and that your efforts will be fruitful! If you have further questions or need additional assistance, we would be happy to support you. www.cornerstoneinclusion.com