



6 Tips for Starting a Successful Faith-based ERG

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Faith-based ERGs, once unheard of, are becoming more and more popular among companies on the cutting edge of diversity and inclusion. At Tanenbaum, we have advised many clients at all stages of the process—from deciding if the time is right to establish a faith-based ERG, to inclusive communications, to planning a launch event. Use these five tips as a starting point to creating a successful faith-based ERG at your company.

- 1. Decide which model is best for your company:** There are three main models for faith-based ERGs: faith-specific, interfaith, and interfaith network. Faith-specific ERGs are created around one particular tradition (ex: American Express has Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups). Interfaith groups are not specific to any one tradition, but are created to recognize a wide array of affiliations (ex: Tanenbaum Corporate Member Merck's Interfaith Organization). Finally, in an interfaith network model, multiple faith-specific groups are under the umbrella of an interfaith body (ex: Ford Motor Company's longstanding Interfaith Network). Consider your current ERG structure, what kind of group has been requested, and resources available when deciding which model is the best fit for your company.
- 2. Solidify the business case:** The rules that apply for ERGs generally apply for faith-based ERGs as well, including having a solid business case. Talk to interested employees to find out how they think the group will benefit the company. Perhaps the group can serve as an internal focus group on religious accommodations the company is considering (such as Quiet Rooms for prayer, meditation, and reflection), or aid the marketing department in reaching different religious communities. There are many ways a faith-based ERG can positively impact the bottom line.
- 3. Make sure it is inclusive:** No matter what model you choose, your faith-based ERG must be open to employees of all faiths and none. "The nones" (people who are atheist, agnostic, spiritual or not affiliated with a particular religious tradition) are a part of the religious diversity landscape at your company, and must be considered in the creation of a faith-based ERG. Faith-specific ERGs (i.e. a Christian ERG) should also be open to employees from other faiths who are interested in learning more about their colleagues' beliefs or in participating in an event the ERG is sponsoring, such as a volunteer event at a local soup kitchen. Another aspect of inclusion worth addressing is the relationship between LGBT inclusion and religion. If you have an existing LGBT ERG, consider asking that group to provide support and guidance in the establishment of the faith-based ERG. This will serve two purposes: the faith-based group will have a mentor group, and the general employee population will see that the two groups are united and working towards the same ultimate goal (inclusion) and are not in opposition.
- 4. Create a communications strategy:** It may not be immediately clear to employees why the company is putting resources into a faith-based group. Some may feel immediately alienated, or even threatened by the prospect. Your communications strategy will be crucial in conveying the

business case, the purpose, and the inclusive nature of the group, while also emphasizing that participating in the group is optional.

5. **Seek out strong leaders:** Finding capable employees to take on leadership roles and bringing on an executive sponsor is a crucial part of the creation of any ERG. Finding leaders who are fully aligned with the group's business case and the company's values will help to alleviate concerns that employees and senior leaders might have about preferential treatment within the group. An executive sponsor who can be a champion for the group and speak to the inclusive nature of the ERG can also make a positive impact in how the group is viewed within the company.
6. **Generate interest through a launch event:** A launch event is a great way to attract members to a new group. The event can be an extension of your communications strategy and showcase the diversity within the group, as well as highlighting the ways in which the group plans to have a positive impact on the business. Having a senior leader (the executive sponsor or another interested party) at the event to give an endorsement can also demonstrate that the company is fully behind the group.

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