

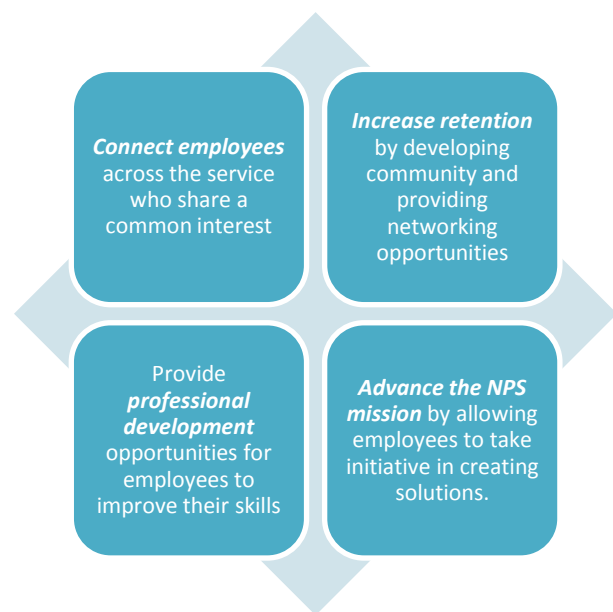
# Guidelines for National Park Service Employee Resource Groups

## Overview

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are employee-led groups with members who are drawn together by a common interest and work towards advancing relevancy, diversity, and inclusion to meet the NPS mission. ERGs benefit employees by increasing connectivity and retention and benefit the organization by expanding recruitment efforts, building more inclusive work environments, and strengthening NPS relevance to the public. These groups also provide developmental opportunities for employees to gain leadership skills. This document will provide information on the benefits of ERGs, expectations, how to form an ERG, how the groups will be held accountable, and how they will be supported.

## Benefits of ERGs

Employee Resource Groups, also referred to as Affinity groups or Employee Networks, have existed in the private sector for over three decades in organizations of various sizes and industries. These groups are composed of employees who share a characteristic, such as race, ethnicity, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, age, etc and their allies. These groups sometimes form out of a common interest, such as Allies for Inclusion, which focuses on dialogue as a vehicle to advance relevancy, diversity, and inclusion in the NPS. ERGs are open to all employees and provide safe spaces for employees to build connections. They allow for the creation of community and professional development, both of which foster employee retention<sup>1</sup>. Employee Resource Groups play a special role in organizations by empowering employees to work collaboratively to create an impact for the entire organization.



<sup>1</sup>See *Employee Resource Groups that Drive Business* (2010)  
<https://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac49/ac55/docs/ERGREportEXTERNAL.pdf>

In the public sector, ERGs have assisted government agencies, such as NASA, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Security Administration, Central Intelligence Agency, U.S. Geological Survey, the Department of Energy, Peace Corps, and the Internal Revenue Service on outreach and recruitment, onboarding, mentoring, networking, training, and leadership development. ERGs also provide an opportunity to assist federal agencies to bolster special emphasis programs, which are mandated by Executive Orders 11478, 13171, 13164, 13126, and 11478. In addition, the formation of Employee Resource Groups is recommended by the Office of Personnel Management as a practice to advance outreach and recruitment efforts, as well as create an inclusive work environment<sup>2</sup>.

## **Organization Strategy**

Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion is paramount in order to meet the NPS mission of preserving and protecting the nation's unique stories and resources. RDI is a paradigm shift from previous diversity efforts. It will guide the NPS to attract and retain a talented workforce, build an equitable workplace that values trust and communication, and instill accountability measures throughout the organization. Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion benefit all employees because it is about building a culture based on trust, inclusion, and transparency where every employee is fully engaged.

Employee Resource Groups play an important role in spreading the concepts of relevancy, diversity, and inclusion across the service. NPS ERGs can connect employees that may sometimes be geographically isolated with community and support. They are also informal ways of developing leaders and creating organizational capacity on important initiatives. As we approach the centennial, newly formed ERGs can provide additional ways to connect with and create the next generation of park visitors, supporters, and advocates.

Two examples of the power of ERGs in the National Park Service include Allies for Inclusion and the Council for Indigenous Relevancy, Communication, Leadership, and Excellent (CIRCLE). Allies for Inclusion is an employee-resource group that harnesses the power of dialogue and education to drive cultural change within the NPS so that we all embrace and respect the full diversity of our nation. For the past two years, 16 core Allies for Inclusion volunteers have held 39 "brown bag" events to engage employees in dialogues around race, class, gender, sexual orientation, veterans, students, and other topics. Over 500 employees have attended these dialogues and 78% of the attendees believed that the forum would assist them in engaging in similar conversations with co-workers and visitors in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> See OPM's *Guidance for Agency-Specific Diversity and Inclusion Plans* (2011) <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/diversity-and-inclusion/reports/diagency-specific-strategic-planning-guidance.pdf>

The Council for Indigenous Relevancy, Communication, Leadership, and Excellence (CIRCLE) is another ERG that serves to enhance the understanding of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian (AI/AN/NH) issues in the NPS. CIRCLE provides recommendations and guidance to NPS leadership regarding the hiring, retention, and improved visibility of AI/AN/NHs throughout the NPS. The CIRCLE has worked with NPS Youth Academy to bring American Indian participation. In addition, the group has provided webinars and presentations on tribal consultation and working with tribes for NPS employees. Learn more about current and upcoming ERGs by visiting the [Employee Center](#).

## Operating Parameters

NPS Employee Resource Groups will follow the following parameters for conducting business. These recommendations are concurrent with the Department of Interior Policy on the formation of Voluntary Employee Organizations<sup>3</sup>.

- Membership to ERGs must be voluntary and open to all employees.
- ERGs must be compliant with non discrimination policies.
- ERGs may not form for the purpose of opposing other groups.
- ERGs may not form for the purpose of advancing political groups.
- ERGs may not be involved in collective bargaining.

## Expectations of ERGs

- Establish an organizational structure with defined roles of leaders and members
- Create a charter with mission, goals, and work plan
- Report regularly to the senior-level sponsor on progress and challenges
- Support the NPS mission through goals and objectives
- Play a role in onboarding new employees and retention of current employees
- Support outreach and recruitment activities
- Create learning and development opportunities for members and all employees
- Foster leadership growth and development for members
- Serve as subject matter experts in advancing relevancy, diversity, and inclusion

## Formation and Recognition

1. ERGs are employee initiated, although leadership can call for the formation of a group. An employee interested in forming an ERG should find at least one representative from each region interested in being part of the group's steering committee.
2. The group should work to create a mission and vision statement for the ERG. The group should also create goals that the group wishes to accomplish.

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<sup>3</sup> See 5 CFR 251 <http://elips.doi.gov/elips/0/doc/4028/Page1.aspx>

3. The group should submit these documents to the ERG coordinator. The ERG Coordinator will work with the group to finalize their charter.
4. The Director of the Office of RDI will review charters for approval.
5. A senior level sponsor will be assigned to each group.

### **Meetings and Accountability**

- Members of the ERG steering committee will hold monthly conference calls.
- Member of the ERG steering committee will hold one in-person meeting per year. The member's park/program/office/region should provide financial support for travel.
- ERGs will prepare and submit an annual report to their executive sponsor. The ERG will also present its accomplishments to the NLC on an annual basis.
- The ERG will have quarterly meetings with their executive sponsor to discuss the workplan, challenges, and successes.

### **ERG support**

The Office of RDI will provide technical support, guidance, and resources such as:

- Support to ERG leaders as they form a new ERG
- Review and approval of ERG charters and documents
- Provide technical support to create a web presence
- Offer coaching and guidance on ERG goals and activities
- Provide financial support for meetings and projects, when possible
- Provide technical assistance and training as needed to build the skills needed to accomplish the goals of the ERG

### **Establishing a foundation during the first years**

The ERG will be expected to accomplish the following goals in the first year:

- Finalize a charter and workplan with specific goals and objectives
- Develop a web presence through partnership with the Office of RDI for current and new NPS employees to assist with onboarding and information sharing
- Create a list serv for interested employees to bolster connectivity
- Host at least one webinar to introduce the ERG and share goals with NPS employees
- Create tools/resources to address recruitment, retention, training and development, or interpretation

For more information on Employee Resource Groups or if you are interested in joining or starting a group, please contact the Office of RDI at [Office\\_RDI@nps.gov](mailto:Office_RDI@nps.gov) or call 202-354-6981.