



Operational Policy

Policy title:	Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)		
Policy number:	DHS-010-016		
Original date:	05/29/2014	Last update:	05/29/2014
Approved:	DHS Operations Executive Team		

Purpose

At the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS), we believe that our continued success in serving all people depends on the diverse skills, experiences, and backgrounds that our employees bring to the agency. To help foster both an inclusive work environment for a diverse workforce as well greater equity for the people we serve, this policy establishes uniform policy and procedures governing Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). More than just a traditional affinity group, ERGs provide a safe and supportive network, typically organized around a shared identity to a) recruit and retain a diverse workforce; and b) to help the agency improve services to an underserved group. Consistent with the mission and core values of DHS, ERGs may offer such services as career development, seek job candidates for open positions, provide support, networking opportunities, mentoring, community engagement, input on safe and equitable services, and assistance in activities that promote cultural awareness and social justice.

Description

This policy applies to all employees of the Department of Human Services (DHS). This policy covers the establishment and agency recognition of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) in support of diversity, inclusion, and equity activities.

Applicability

This policy applies to all DHS staff including employees, volunteers, interns and agency contractors.

As keepers of the public trust, all agency employees have a responsibility to comply with state and agency policies, administrative rule, and state and federal law. The agency takes this responsibility seriously and failure to fulfill this responsibility is not treated lightly. Employees who fail to comply with state or agency policy, administrative rule, or state and federal law may face progressive discipline, up to and including dismissal from state service.

Policy

1. This policy covers the establishment and agency recognition of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) in support of diversity, inclusion, and equity activities. All agency employees, volunteers, or interns seeking official agency recognition of an Employee Resource Group (ERG) shall follow the steps and guidelines as outlined in procedure DHS01-TBA

a. Definition

For the purposes of this policy, an Employee Resource Group (ERG) shall be defined as an *officially chartered group that is organized around shared cultural identity(ies) to support historically underrepresented DHS employees and/or underserved client populations. An ERG is an utilization of the agency's own talent to serve as internal subject matter experts (SMEs).*

- A. Employee Resource Groups must be operated in a manner consistent with DHS mission, Core Values, policies, federal, state, and local laws.
- B. ERGs must clearly demonstrate how the group will benefit the agency's diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts.
- C. ERGs may not be organized solely for general interest, recreation, sports, or hobby purposes (*e.g. – Chess Club, Softball Team, etc.*), although an ERG may include such activities if it can demonstrate how it relates to its larger mission and purpose.
- D. ERGs may not be organized for prohibited political or religious purposes.
- E. Official Employee Resource Groups must be approved by the Agency Director, or their designee.

b. Naming of an ERG

The name of the Employee Resource Group shall reflect the group's mission and values. The decision for naming the Employee Resource Group must include name recommendations from prospective Employee Resource Group members and shall clearly communicate the identity of the Employee Resource Group.

Examples include:

- the disABILITY Network Alliance at Bristol-Myers Squibb works to enhance a culture of inclusion for the disability community by leveraging each employee's unique abilities, raising awareness, valuing differences, removing barriers and encouraging a workplace built on dignity, trust and respect;
- Lucent's EQUAL! (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) Group gives LGBT employees a network of people for career advancement by creating a more equitable and safe work environment for LGBT employees and supporting the professional development of LGBT employees;
- Advocates For Achievement (AFA) at St. Paul Public Schools is a resource group that focuses on the needs and development of staff and communities of African- descent;
- Connected Women (CW) at Cisco Systems empowers the professional growth of female employees by offering networking, mentoring, and career development resources; and
- Multnomah County's Veterans Employee Resource Group (VERG) brings the concerns of veteran employees to county leadership and first-line supervisors.

c. Requirements to Obtain & Maintain ERG Status

- A. Each group must be officially recognized by the DHS Director (or their designee such as the Office of Equity and Multicultural Services) through an application process that includes having a formal charter, member roles, goals, and rules which establishes a sustainable structure and its relevance to the business of the agency. ERG Charters must be reapproved every biennium.
- B. Each group has a senior level manager as a "sponsor," whose role is to be an

advocate and ally to the ERG to remove institutional barriers to success.

- C. ERGs must maintain at least five (5) active members and meet at least once a calendar year.
- D. Each ERG submits an Annual Report by June 15th of every year to the Agency Director or their designee.
- E. ERGs must be supportive, inclusive, and respectful of other Employee Resource Groups.

d. Structure and Operation

Employee Resource Groups are recognized by DHS as a vital component in diversity development and inclusion. DHS recognizes that Employee Resource Groups are chartered committees within their respective agencies; however, if an Employee Resource Group demonstrates that it can represent one or more agency interests and choose to operate as such, it may be considered as a “shared” resource. However, any ERGs officially recognized by DHS must abide by the conditions set forth in this policy, unless a specific exception is granted by the DHS Director or designee in writing.

Each Employee Resource Group is responsible for:

- A. Managing how it will be organized, which may include how formal or informal the group may be;
- B. Deciding how to select leadership and recruit membership;
- C. Determining meetings and activities including frequency, location, purpose and content of meetings;
- D. Developing and maintaining group contacts, email and mailing lists;
- E. Facilitating communication among members.

e. Employee Participation & Paid Time

Official ERG activities sanctioned by the agency shall be considered paid work time. Supervisors are encouraged to include an employee’s participation in an ERG as part of the Employee Development Plan (EDP) and support an employee’s participation in the ERG and its sanctioned activities:

- A. The agency shall allow employees who are regular members of the ERG the ability to attend meetings and activities for the group, up to eight (8) hours per month of work time. Reasonable travel time should be considered paid time in addition to the eight hour allowance depending on the distance and location of the activity. Supervisors reserve the right to ask employees on a one-time basis to not attend due to an emergency, coverage, workload issue, or unavoidable budgetary issue.
- B. ERG Officers/Leadership shall be allowed an additional eight hours a month (for a total of 16 hours) to conduct ERG business on behalf of the agency.
- C. Supervisors should reassign or reschedule work to allow for participation, where it would

not constitute an undue burden on operations.

- D. If an Employee Resource Group member requires additional time beyond what is allowed above, the request shall be discussed with the employee's direct supervisor or manager, following standard procedure, policy, and criteria for requesting work time for agency business. Supervisors are strongly encouraged to grant reasonable requests for additional release time whenever possible for legitimate ERG-related business (i.e. – regular meetings, attending job fairs, hiring committees, DEAC meetings, mentoring, etc.).
- E. If an employee believes that there is an ongoing pattern of refusal by their supervisor to not allow attendance at an ERG, they may directly address this with their supervisor. If no resolution is reached, they may then appeal to the next level of management who will consult with the program/field, Office of Human Resources, and Office of Equity and Multicultural Services to issue a response.
- F. Misuse or false misrepresentation of work done by an employee will be investigated and subject to discipline up to and including termination.
- G. All DHS staff must be allowed equal opportunity to participate on any ERG, so long as they are supportive and an ally to the mission of the group. ERG leadership may engage in due process (such as a majority vote) to remove individuals if they violate ERG rules, demonstrate disruptive, disrespectful, or unprofessional behavior. Employees removed from ERG membership shall be notified in writing and a copy shall be sent to their direct supervisor.
- H. ERG charters or rules may limit membership to certain types of employees as long as it is not due to a legally protected class. (e.g. – Child Welfare staff, Management staff, a certain number of staff, etc.)
- I. ERGs may choose to include non-DHS employees, such as community partners, volunteers, interns and others as members, although non-DHS employees may not hold Chair, Co-Chair, President, Vice-President, or equivalent top leadership positions unless the ERG is chartered as a “shared” service with another state agency.

f. Prohibited Activities

A. Political Activities. State law and DHS policy prohibits public employees from engaging in certain political activities while on the job during working hours (see DHS-010-003 on Political Activity).

1. Any Employee Resource Group designed around prohibited political activity, including, but not limited to, the topic of political candidacy and political measures (whether for or against) will not be approved.
2. Employee Resource Groups may not engage in inappropriate political activity, including but not limited to seeking to advance a political position or candidate, or to convince other employees to adopt or adhere to a particular political position or viewpoint.
3. This section should not be interpreted as prohibiting ERGs from providing recommendations to agency leadership on legislative concepts or analysis of impacts of proposed legislation on the agency and the communities that DHS serves.

B. Religious Activities.

1. Employee Resource Groups may not be organized for the purpose of advancing or opposing any specific religion, religious viewpoint or belief.
2. Employee Resource Groups may not engage in religious or worship activity.
3. This section should not be interpreted to interfere with any individual employee right or religious accommodation that is permissible by law and policy.

g. Discontinuing Employee Resource Groups

The ERG's recognized leadership or the DHS Director, on the recommendation of the Office of Equity and Multicultural Services, may discontinue an Employee Resource Group by providing, in writing, the reason(s) for ending the group's activities. Once the receiving party has reviewed the letter, it may accept the decision (by issuing a statement of acceptance) or request a meeting to allow for a more comprehensive discussion before a final decision by the DHS Director is reached.

Reasons for discontinuation may include, but are not limited to:

- Actions or conduct that reflect negatively on the agency or state
- Low membership (less than five) or inactivity for a prolonged period
- Found incidents of discrimination of interested members
- Inability to demonstrate sufficient achievement of Employee Resource Group goals
- Inability/unwillingness to comply with Employee Resource Group policy and procedures
- Inability/unwillingness to comply with State of Oregon or DHS policy
- Gross misconduct or mismanagement unbecoming of a state sponsored entity

References

In addition to the links provided below, employees should also refer to related process maps and protocols, including agency guidelines, departmental or program best practices and program procedure manuals.

[DHS-010-003 on Political Activity](#)

Definitions

Agency: Oregon Department of Human Services

Ally: An ally is a member of the advantaged social group who takes a stand against social injustice directed at targeted groups they are not part of. (*e.g.* - *Whites who speak out against racism, men who are anti-sexist, heterosexuals who support LGBTQ causes*). An ally uses their societal privilege/advantage/dominance to be an agent of social change rather than an agent of oppression.

Cultural Identity: One's feeling of belonging or affiliation to specific group(s) or culture(s).

Culture: A dynamic system of learned behavior patterns which are generally characteristic of the members of a society or geographic area and which is not a result of biological inheritance. Often cultural groups may have shared experiences or history that shape behaviors. These learned

behaviors may include:

- Values, norms & expectations, attitudes, beliefs, practices
- Age, ability, gender, race /ethnicity, sexual orientation
- Language, history, geography, customs, rituals
- Food, clothing, music, literature, art, religion
- Education and literacy, occupation, income, social class and status, leisure activities

Diversity: The mosaic of people who bring a variety of backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values, and beliefs as assets to the groups and organizations which they interact. It is the overall similarities and differences within the demographics of a group.

Employee Resource Group (ERG): An officially chartered group that is organized around shared cultural identity(ies) to support historically underrepresented DHS employees and/or underserved client populations.

Forms referenced

DHS Employee Resource Group Application

Related policies

Contact

Policy history

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