

How To Make Your Women's Resource Group Powerful: Findings from the Fairygodboss Galvanize Summit



Photos by Krisanne Johnson

Table Of Contents

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Employee Resource Group Statistics
- III. Governance, Mandate and Measuring Success
- IV. Talent Development and Succession Planning
- V. Intersectionality
- VI. Male Allies
- VII. Participation and Engagement
- VIII. Attracting Female Talent
- IX. Engaging Management and Effecting Policy
- X. Driving Retention
- XI. Conclusions

I. Executive Summary

The [Fairygodboss](#) mission is to improve the workplace for women by increasing transparency. Since 2015, the startup has provided a free and safe space for women to share their workplace experiences authentically. On the Fairygodboss platform, women anonymously provide information about what their jobs are like and whether their employers are supportive of women — and job seekers who register on the site can access this information for free.

Fairygodboss hosted its first-ever summit on Nov. 1-2, 2017, in an effort to further its mission and create connections that would lead to faster progress on gender parity. At the inaugural conference, called “[Galvanize: Making Women’s Resource Groups Powerful](#),” top leaders from a variety of industries and Fortune 500 companies assembled to further discuss how employers and women’s resource groups can best support female talent.

The summit focused on women’s networks in particular because they are ubiquitous: employee resource groups (ERGs) exist at 90% of Fortune 500 companies. However, [research conducted in 2017 by Fairygodboss](#) suggests that employee resource groups have much room to be made more effective and impactful.

Approximately 100 business leaders representing corporate women’s groups from over 50 major US corporations attended Galvanize 2017, and they shared information and best practices about their employers, jobs, and resource groups. Leaders of women’s corporate networks identified actionable ideas to make ERGs more effective and relevant, addressed the most urgent issues that working women face today, and discussed how both women and men can [advance gender diversity in the workplace](#) by opening channels of communication between women’s networks.

In addition to sharing best practices and brainstorming solutions, Galvanize attendees heard directly from top changemakers on how they are changing the corporate culture. Iconic speakers at Galvanize included:

- [Beth Comstock](#), GE’s first-ever female Vice Chair
- [Deborah Rosado Shaw](#), PepsiCo’s SVP, Chief Global Diversity Engagement Officer
- [Ellyn Shook](#), Chief Leadership & Human Resource Officer at Accenture
- [Karen Quintos](#), Dell’s first Chief Customer Officer
- [Mike Preston](#), Deloitte’s Chief Talent Officer
- [Georgene Huang & Romy Newman](#), Fairygodboss Co-founders

...along with many more inspiring leaders across a variety of industries.

Fairygodboss has amassed unique, proprietary findings from both the summit and from prior research and has summarized those findings in this report, which presents findings on the wide range of obstacles ERGs face, what areas of focus will help them retain relevancy, and what practices and communications correlate with their missions.

Some of the key takeaways:

- **Safe spaces are crucial components of inclusivity**

The meetings, events, and lines of communication provided by ERGs create a safe space to discuss issues within the workplace. While these can range from discussing an unsupportive supervisor to [how to solve the gender pay gap](#), ERGs provide underrepresented employees with an opportunity to have their voices heard. By coming together, employees — along with sponsors, advocates, and allies — can create short- and long-term solutions.

- **Transparency is key**

Open lines of communication are crucial to the success of ERGs. ERGs must strive to ensure that they receive executive support, which will help them align with the company's overall strategic initiatives. By doing so, ERGs ensure their continued effectiveness as a corporate and personal resource. Simultaneously, ERGs must hold themselves accountable to their constituents by soliciting [feedback](#), creating open dialogue with allies, and inspiring continued engagement for new and veteran employees.

- **Executive engagement is essential**

Executive engagement in ERGs is crucial because it ensures well-established governance structures that lead to progress, and it also helps ERG leaders to align their objectives with corporate strategy. For instance, one company represented at Galvanize instituted a policy that requires senior advisory council to meet with ERG representatives to discuss their charter, the ERG's recent accomplishments, and how women can continue to keep the lines of business connected and engaged.

- **For maximum success, engage male allies**

The support of [male allies](#) is a [crucial form of advocacy](#) for women in the workplace, something attendees spoke to time and again. When ERGs engage male allies, they utilize positive peer pressure to spread a culture of accountability and inclusivity. And according to [research](#) presented at Galvanize, the impact male allies can make is considerable — they found that when men champion gender diversity, 97% of those workplaces' diversity programs saw progress. But when men remain outside of the conversation and don't make diversity a priority, only 39% do.

- **The most effective initiatives are both ambitious and specific**

We know that ERGs can truly carry an impact — if their initiatives can avoid becoming lost in abstract ideas and language. The mission of these ERGs must boil down to specific and actionable items that groups can accomplish within a designated period of time. Establishing [SMART goals](#) — or, goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based — can help you realistically measure your objectives and provide a concise plan for what your group is hoping to achieve and why.

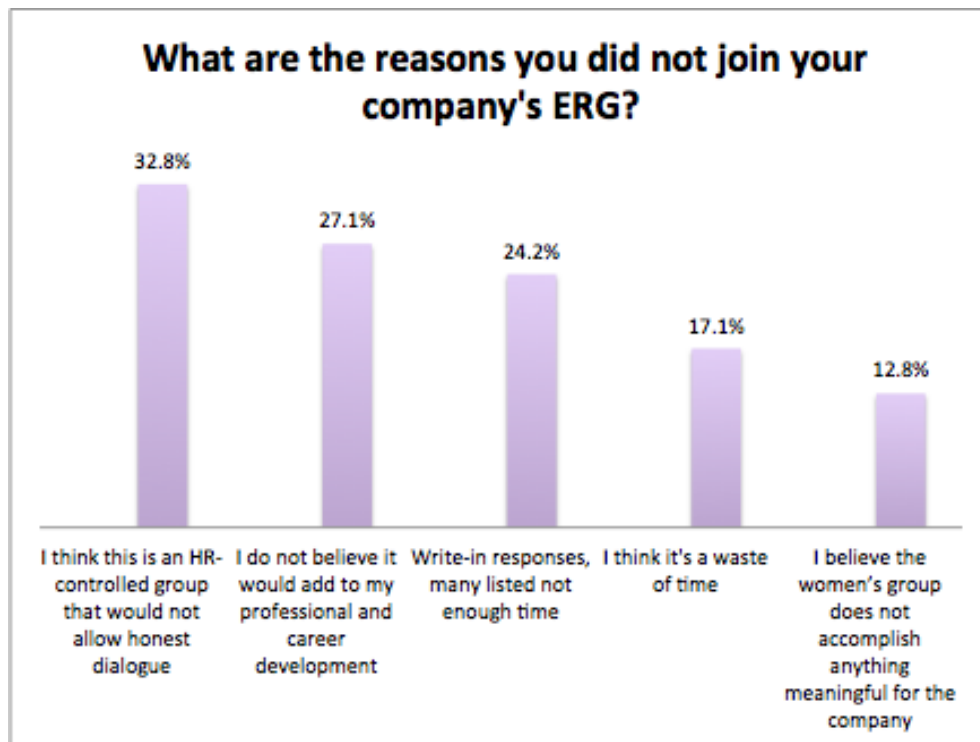
- **Employee resource groups *work***

When fully utilized by employees and employers, ERGs can positively impact across all lines of business. ERGs provide unique resources within traditional corporate governance structures and can help diversify talent pipelines, strengthen corporate communication initiatives, and encourage cross-collaboration throughout different departments. Within the workplace of the future, ERGs serve as a key resource on multiple levels.

II. Employee Resource Group Statistics

In the U.S., there are over 73 million working women representing approximately 47% of the labor force, as defined by the latest annual U.S. Department of Labor statistics. ERGs exist at 90% of Fortune 500 companies. When surveying women whose employers offered internal women's networking groups, Fairygodboss found that 65% of respondents said they belonged to their women's ERG.

The 35% of women who do *not* participate in their employer's ERG cited a wide variety of reasons for declining to participate. Many women said they don't have enough time, and many also said they believe that ERGs lack meaningful impact on policy, company culture, and professional, and career development.



At Galvanize 2017, attendees broke up into groups to discuss particular areas that women's ERGs can focus on to drive more effective change. Breakout teams then summarized their findings to the whole group, and some attendees also shared best practices within their organizations. Galvanize participants can bring some of these new ideas back to their employers and ERGs to improve overall workplace culture.

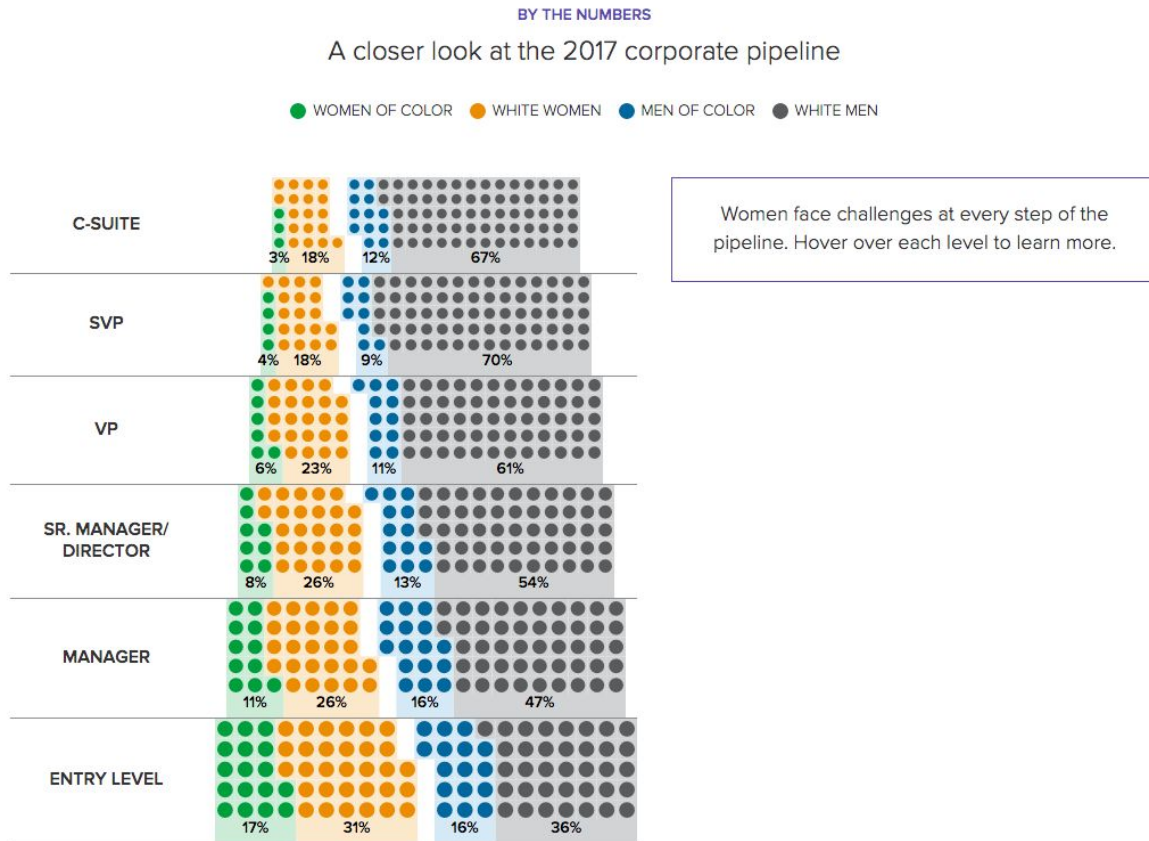
Companies involved in this discussion and represented at Galvanize included:

[Accenture](#)
[ADP](#)
[AIG](#)
[Allianz](#)
[Aon Hewitt](#)
[AppNexus](#)
[Artemis Connection](#)
[Avanade](#)
[Bank of America](#)
[Blackstone](#)
[BNY Mellon](#)
[Boston Consulting Group](#)
[Brother](#)
[Capital One](#)
[CDW Corporation](#)
[Centene Corporation](#)
[Charles Schwab](#)
[Citi](#)
[Credit Suisse](#)
[Dagne Dover](#)
[Dell](#)
[Deloitte](#)
[Dow Jones](#)
[Ellevest Network](#)
[Ericsson](#)
[EY](#)
[Fortune](#)
[GE](#)
[GoDaddy](#)
[Goldman Sachs](#)
[Google](#)
[Hearst](#)
[IBM](#)
[JP Morgan Chase](#)
[Liberty Mutual](#)
[Maven](#)
[McKinsey & Company](#)
[Merck](#)
[Morgan Stanley](#)
[The New York Times](#)
[OnDeck](#)
[Paid Leave](#)

[Palantir Technologies, Inc.](#)
[Pandora](#)
[Paypal](#)
[PepsiCo](#)
[PwC](#)
[Ralph Lauren](#)
[Snap](#)
[Sprint](#)
[Squarespace](#)
[Sterling Talent Solutions](#)
[Talking Talent](#)
[TD Bank](#)
[Thomson Reuters](#)
[Time Inc.](#)
[T-Mobile](#)
[United Technologies](#)
Workparent
[XO Group](#)
[Zillow](#)
[ZS](#)
[Zurich](#)

III. Governance, Mandate and Measuring Success

According to the [Women in the Workplace 2017](#) study put out by McKinsey & Co. and Lean In, women are underrepresented in line roles at every level of the corporate pipeline. And while most ERGs are open to employees of all levels, Fairygodboss data shows that the majority of women's ERG participants identify as mid-level career professionals.



Total percent of women and men per level in race and gender pipeline may not sum to overall corporate pipeline totals, as the race pipeline only includes companies that were able to supply race data. Due to rounding, representation by race may sum to 101 within some levels.

[Image via Lean In and McKinsey & Company](#)

Fairygodboss findings also show that ERGs can maximize their impact through executive support; yet, only 11% of ERG participants are at the executive level. Strengthening the lines of communications between executives and other levels of career professionals leads to stronger governance of ERGs and more solidified metrics of success.

Galvanize attendees discussed their experiences within their respective ERGs and determined

two strategies to establish long-term success for corporate ERGs:

- **Ensure executive support**

Executive involvement in ERGs — specifically around women’s ERGs — ensures well-established governance structures and consistent progress toward long-term objectives and goals. When c-suite executives, EVPs, and SVPs are each tasked with leading one ERG, the accountable executive ensures that ERG objectives align with company strategy. Through this, ERGs retain relevance and can ensure that their actions have a larger ripple effect on company culture.

One Galvanize attendee, who works at Capital One, explained, “One of the things that we’ve done is instituted a senior advisory council that brings in some of the most senior women across the business as part of the ERG. We meet with them every other month to talk about the charter for the ERG, what we’ve accomplished, what’s on the company’s strategic agenda, and how the women’s ERG can influence that. It’s been really successful in keeping the women’s business connected and engaged to the ERG’s imperatives.”

- **Support different kinds of employee engagement**

Both community events and localized engagement events boost employee morale and provide insight into measuring the success of engagement within ERGs. However, they do not necessarily drive strategic objectives that ERGs use to measure success. By clearly establishing which objectives are meant to support community engagement and which are meant to drive further progress around strategy, ERGs have clearer goals overall.

As one Galvanize attendee from Goldman Sachs shared, “We see our Affinity networks as a way to create events that promote discussion, that promote inclusion, and that promote education. Last night, our firm-wide women’s network collaborated with all of our Affinity networks to screen a documentary that explores a rising trend in America around breadwinner mothers and primary care dads at home.... Networking across our firms creates business opportunities... it just gets more support for the networks.”

To strengthen executive governance and establish stronger metrics for success, ERGs within Fortune 500 companies have implemented policies in line with the recommendations above. For instance, Capital One instituted a policy that requires senior advisory council to meet with ERG representatives to discuss their charter, the ERG’s recent accomplishments, and how women can continue to keep the lines of business connected and engaged.

IV. Talent Development and Succession Planning

ERGs can be a useful resource in helping to get more women into management positions. Women's networks can be used to encourage or require company leaders to identify talented professionals and provide them with professional development opportunities.

Identifying internal and external talent is crucial to reaching larger business strategy initiatives. ERGs can play a significant role in this, as well as ensure a diverse talent pipeline for senior-level roles — where much of this corporate strategy is ideated and put it into practice. In order to continue widening the successes of ERGs in developing corporate talent, Galvanize participants recognized the need for a multi-step approach:

- **Pinpoint executives who can identify talent and serve as [sponsors](#)**

The first part of the approach is to require (and perhaps incentivize) executives to search harder for talent, and to not only [mentor](#) employees, but also to provide sponsorship opportunities. A representative from this breakout session, who works at Talking Talent, explained, “That means making the leap from somebody who is giving you advice and sharing best practices to somebody who is going to put their political capital on the line and suggest that individual for a project, that they put their name forward for a [promotion](#).”

- **Provide professional development opportunities to individuals**

The second part of this approach is supporting individuals who are proactively looking for opportunities to upscale their personal professional development. As executives shift from traditional mentors to more active sponsors, they can work with ERGs to support individuals who are actively seeking development opportunities and provide them with the additional resources they need to succeed.

The group representative told attendees, “We talked about helping people get the additional support, training and upscaling when they need it at these different phases of their career. Say you just got a promotion, that may be a time where you really need to know some new skills.”

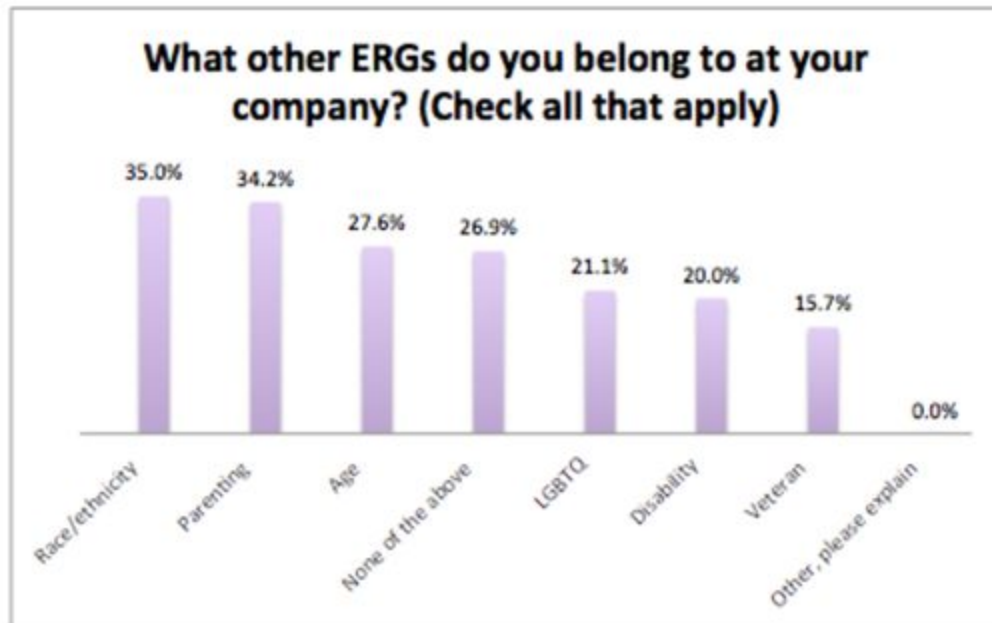
- **Raise visibility of success stories**

The best form of marketing for this two-pronged approach is to show that it works. Corporate communications and social media can simultaneously highlight the ways ERGs can sponsor individuals and provide transparency into the support system that ERGs provide.

For example, Ericsson recently pushed social media messaging around diversity to raise awareness about their best practice. This includes a [careers blog](#) that gives female employees — specifically female employees of color — the chance to publicly talk about their experiences.

V. Intersectionality

Women are a very diverse group. While women-focused ERGs are dedicated to advancing the needs of women in today's workforce, they also have the task of representing all other ERGs within their ERG. As women's ERGs focus on policies that are good for women in general, it's important to acknowledge how these policies also affect and intersect with the needs of other ERGs as a result.



Fairygodboss survey respondents belong to a variety of ERGs, highlighting the intersectionality of women within the workplace. Ensuring [diversity](#) within your ERGs is the most powerful way possible to impact change across all aspects of a company's population. It is also a challenge for any single ERG to be all things to all people, and recognizing the natural obstacles that come alongside that is key to supporting intersectionality within the workplace.

Galvanize attendees who were tasked with troubleshooting this topic highlighted three strategies. These approaches, listed below, can be used to celebrate intersectionality within ERGs and to emphasize the support that ERGs can provide to employees of all genders, races, [sexual orientations](#), ethnicities, and perspectives:

- **Assign a specific, yearly theme to all ERGs having to do with intersectionality**

At the beginning of each year, assign a theme that all ERGs can build events and conversations around that year. By making this theme be one that deals with or is relevant to intersectionality

and multi-hyphenated identities, you're ensuring that intersectionality is a core part of the framework for these groups and their reasons for convening. You'll also be providing space for a diverse range of perspectives to provide insight on policy, company culture, and business strategy. It's important that all employees have a safe space to reflect on the progress (or lack thereof) happening within the workplace.

At Galvanize, a representative from Goldman Sachs explained: "We know that the women in different divisions are facing different things, so our women in technology, the things they are focused on, are very different from our women in securities division. Intersectionality is a big theme of ours."

- **Create spaces for allyship**

It's important to create spaces where employees feel comfortable asking questions and learning how to best support different perspectives within the workplace. Though it may not make sense to create an ERG for employees whose experiences have always been at the forefront of the conversation (e.g. having an ERG for white men), giving those employees the support and resources they need to best understand and be an advocate for diversity within the workplace is key.

"The women's network at Goldman is our longest running network," said the Goldman Sachs employee. "It launched in 2001, and now in the Americas alone we have 6,000 members. Seventy-four percent of the members are women, 26 percent are men, and it has been an ongoing focus of ours to increase male representation. We do see men come to our events and we really encourage them to be part of the discussion and engage different perspectives."

A commonly discussed theme throughout all of Galvanize, in fact, was the need for male allyship. The Intersectionality breakout group found that the best way for companies to endorse this kind of allyship — not just for men, but allies at large — may be through creating an ERG that's specifically for Allies. Through that ERG, people would have the opportunity to learn more about different groups' needs and experiences.

- **Encourage cross-collaboration across ERGs**

ERGs are beneficial in providing support to both the individual and the company at large. Bringing different ERGs together creates an inclusive environment that invites employees to actively engage with not only each other, but also with their employer in an authentic way. One way this cross-collaboration can be better enabled is by holding events around specific holidays and/or dates that have significance for more than one ERG.

As the Intersectionality breakout group representative, who works at Charles Schwab, said: "It's important to have cross-events connected to specific dates and have some inclusion with some of the other ERGs. So, an example of that would be Black History Month; you would also

include the other ERGs — say, the LGBTQ community — coming in and looking at it from that angle and bringing in their wealth of knowledge and having that shared amongst the event.”

The Goldman Sachs representative added: “We had to stop with all the programming and events and everything going on, because you’d have different divisions holding similar events. Instead, bring all these people together and it feels like a much larger group. What we realized is if we bring all these people together, it becomes more inclusive. We’ve actually seen a huge increase of people opting in their affiliation groups because of the emphasis of intersectionality, which is kind of similar to what Deloitte is doing.”

VI. Male Allies



The higher up the corporate ladder you go, the less women are represented — though men and women often observe the reasons for *why* this is the case differently, as evidenced by the [Boston Consulting Group research](#) shared above.

While it will require a variety of techniques, policies, and forms of support to achieve gender parity within corporate America, the support of [male allies](#) is a [crucial form of advocacy](#) for women. When ERGs engage male allies, they utilize positive peer pressure to spread a culture of accountability and inclusivity.

Galvanize attendees came across the concern that opening all ERG events to male allies would eliminate the safe space that ERG events can provide to employees. No ERG wants to appear closed-off and like they selectively alienate themselves from the larger company culture; welcoming male allies into the conversation and preserving the unique resources of the ERG is a delicate balance that current resource groups struggle with maintaining.

Galvanize attendees who partook in conversations around this topic suggested the below strategies for incorporating male allies into ERG discussions:

- **Create a male allyship toolkit**

Galvanize attendees suggested creating an easily accessible set of resources that men can reference and utilize when they witness gender discrepancies at work. Some examples would be when [women are interrupted in meetings](#), unreasonably passed over for promotions, or even [sexually harassed](#).

- **Champion male leadership**

When male executives exemplify male ally behavior, encourage them to share their perspectives with younger men within their workplace. This kind of positive peer pressure can be capitalized upon to find additional allies who will support your ERG's initiative and, as a result, your business' overall strategy. If it's difficult to find male allies within your current organization, don't hesitate to look to competitors to showcase the kind of support your team needs to reach its goals.

"In my industry, we certainly love to benchmark ourselves against everyone, so the peer pressure does help quite a bit," said one Galvanize attendee. "You can point out our major competitors, who are going after the same talent as us, are sharing their data and are making this kind of progress."

A Galvanize participant who works at GoDaddy explained that "GoDaddy was one of the first companies to share salary data broken out by gender and level. It has allowed us to make a lot of changes and, frankly, it's positioned the company in the broader workplace. You can use that to point out to other companies that, yes, it's uncomfortable and scary, but it's actually been very helpful. In our case, we have a CEO who is just genuinely committed and cares and is going to do the right thing."

Separately, ERGs assist in recognizing larger, systemic problems within corporate culture that are tied to specific individuals. As one Galvanize attendee who works at XO Group said:

"Some of the things that we've experienced are very subtle. We had agreed that if we noticed multiple people complaining about the same person, or if a lot of women had a lot of issues with a lot of men at work, then that was something we were definitely going [address as] a systemic problem.]"

- **Engage your allies**

Keep your ERG transparent, encourage allies to attend ERG-hosted company-wide events, and invite new allies to participate as needed. Bring a male ally to your next ERG meeting or host an all-male panel to understand their perspectives when it comes to further interacting with your ERG's goals and overall strategy.

However, in order to preserve a safe space for employees to discuss the issues they face, remember to balance allyship engagement with private conversation. Based on the

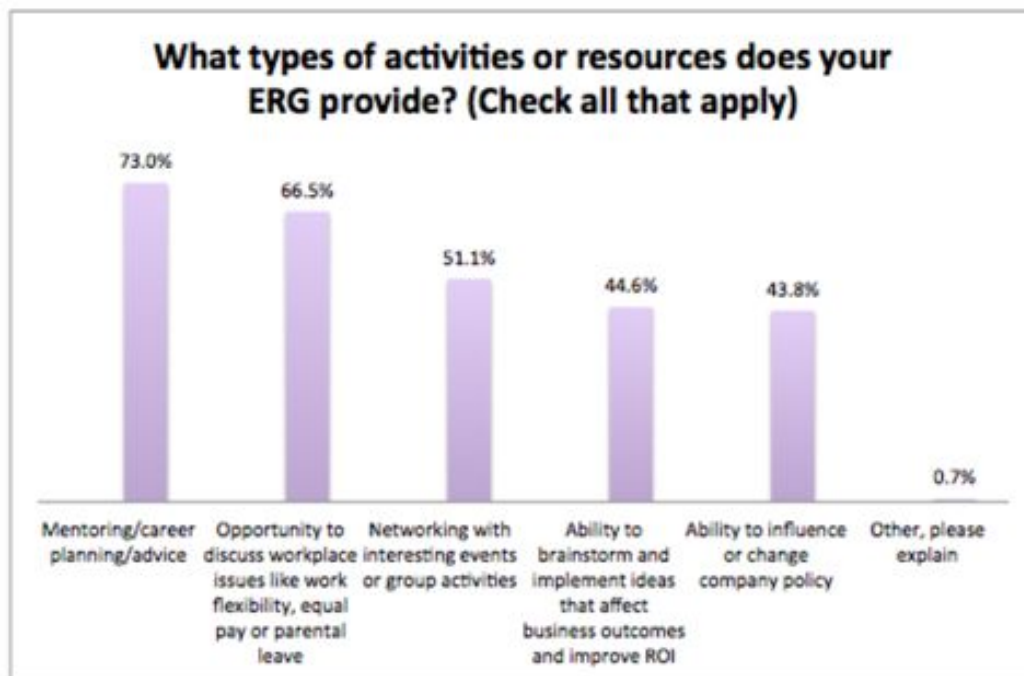
conversations surrounding this concern at Galvanize 2017, there does not seem to be a one-size-fits-all solution for this; it must be handled on a case-by-case basis. As the XO Group representative said:

“We had talked about when it’s appropriate to invite our male allies into the space and when we need this safe space where we can talk about issues that are happening that are prevalent to us as individuals. If somebody has an issue with a particular person [who identifies as] a male ally and comes to the meeting [intending to] complain about that guy because he’s not as woke as he thinks he is, then obviously [those complaints are] going to be tabled for another day.”

VII. Participation and Engagement

The successes of ERGs mean little if they're not acknowledged throughout the larger organization. While there are clear benefits to establishing and participating in ERGs, the continued success of resource group relies on a consistent influx of new participants and engagement from employees, executives, and external resources. When employees decide whether to or to not join a resource group, those who join do so because of the benefits participation brings.

While participants are aware of all of the resources that ERGs provide, individuals outside of the ERGs are not always aware of the multitude of resources at their fingertips.



ERGs must regularly communicate with executives and their corporate communications team to amplify awareness of their own initiatives, benefits, and resources. This maximizes the effect of engagement and encourages others to participate. Galvanize attendees determined three key strategies to ensure consistent participation and engagement with ERGs:

- **Create a deliberate communication plan with the larger organization**

By actively communicating the ERG's successes and strategy, you are marketing the ERG's brand within your organization and highlighting your inclusion strategy to the executive team. This also functions to extend the conversations happening within ERGs to environments outside

of these designated safe spaces in a non-threatening way. Pointing out when individuals are being inclusive draws them in, aligns them with the ERG's mission, and challenges employees within the organization to be more inclusive and supportive.

Establishing [SMART goals](#) for your ERG can be beneficial here. The SMART acronym — specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based — helps to realistically measure your objectives and can be used to provide a concise plan for what your group is hoping to achieve and why. When summarizing your ERG goals for the executive team, using this framework help to will identify important steps, accomplishments, and needs that you can address.

- **Solicit internal feedback**

How do you know that you have truly delivered on an ask from your peers? By seeking their feedback. Are they getting what they asked you for, and what you have supposedly delivered? If the answer is “yes,” then you can move onto the next goal your ERG sets. If not, reassess your current plans and determine where the misstep occurred. If an ERG is not working for its constituents, then it's simply not working. Consistently evaluate your progress and share your findings with the company. A group representative, who works at ADP, said:

“If a tree falls in the woods and no one's there to hear it... you know how it ends. Affinity groups, employee resource groups, business resource groups — those groups exist because of the membership. If you don't know what those groups are expecting, then you can't necessarily deliver on it. So you have to have an understanding of what your associates and what your employees want.”

- **Hold leadership accountable**

Aside from assessing the overall performance of the ERG and whether or not it's achieved its objectives, business leaders who have agreed to sponsor or play a larger role in the ERG must play their part and be held accountable. Incorporating an evaluation component to assess executive, sponsor, and business leader participation is an important step in ensuring that the ERG has the support that it needs.

Some companies have seen success in giving younger associates a stretch assignment of being an ERG leader. This approach holds the dual function of developing the associates into leaders and also providing the ERG with additional leadership support. The breakout group representative spoke to that:

“If you have an executive sponsor who's absent or missing except for one meeting a year, you've got a problem, right? With engaged sponsors and engaged leaders, you get engagement within your organization. That will trickle down into the associates that are maybe not a part of those groups but want to get on the bandwagon and get as engaged. If you give them value, you get value back.”

- **VIII. Attracting Female Talent**

When properly utilized, employee resource groups can assist companies in [attracting and retaining female talent](#). Women employees benefit from the resources, networking opportunities and space to discuss pressing workplace issues. Companies benefit from the vocal support those employees showcase for their ERGs; by combining ERG resources with talent acquisition techniques, employers create more diverse talent pipelines, which can in turn lead to more diverse workplaces.

As one Galvanize attendee from Ericsson said when discussing her company's best practices:

"We use ERGs as a great resource. We're really engaging our diverse employees in all of our messaging, and I think this has enabled us to really raise our profile and amplify our voice around diversity by putting our employees at the front of all of our messaging, whether it's being a [brand ambassador](#), a blog author, or even Instagram. We're making sure that we're showcasing women."

ERG benefits can assist with talent acquisition through the below strategies:

- **Combine ERG events with talent acquisition initiatives**

Especially in larger companies, resource groups are not always aware of what other such groups are doing, or of what hiring initiatives are happening within the company at large. By creating more transparency amongst themselves, ERGs can notify recruitment teams of their global calendar and how they may be able to participate in those events. Allowing talent acquisition teams to leverage ERG events around talent they eventually want to recruit ultimately creates a pipeline that directly incorporates ERGs into the hiring process. This allows companies to efficiently track and measure interest through attendance and additional surveys.

Utilizing virtual outreach can also assist in diverse talent acquisition, the representative from Ericsson said. "We recently had a virtual career chat where prospects could talk to recruiters or diverse employees and learn more about what it's like to work at Ericsson. We did more diversity engagement and training, we did more focus groups, and we launched a diversity campaign that allowed our employees to really push and incorporate their messages and experiences around diversity across all our channels."

- **Establish a brand ambassador program**

Many ERGs are provided with legally approved language to promote the company's initiatives to female talent. However, leveraging ERG members who already have a shared, vested interest in the mission is an opportunity to use unique employee voices to reach a wider base of talent. By training employees and allowing them to share the company's message through their own

perspectives, the brand message is spread organically through employee networks, like social media, blog posts, and more.

- **Diversify talent slates**

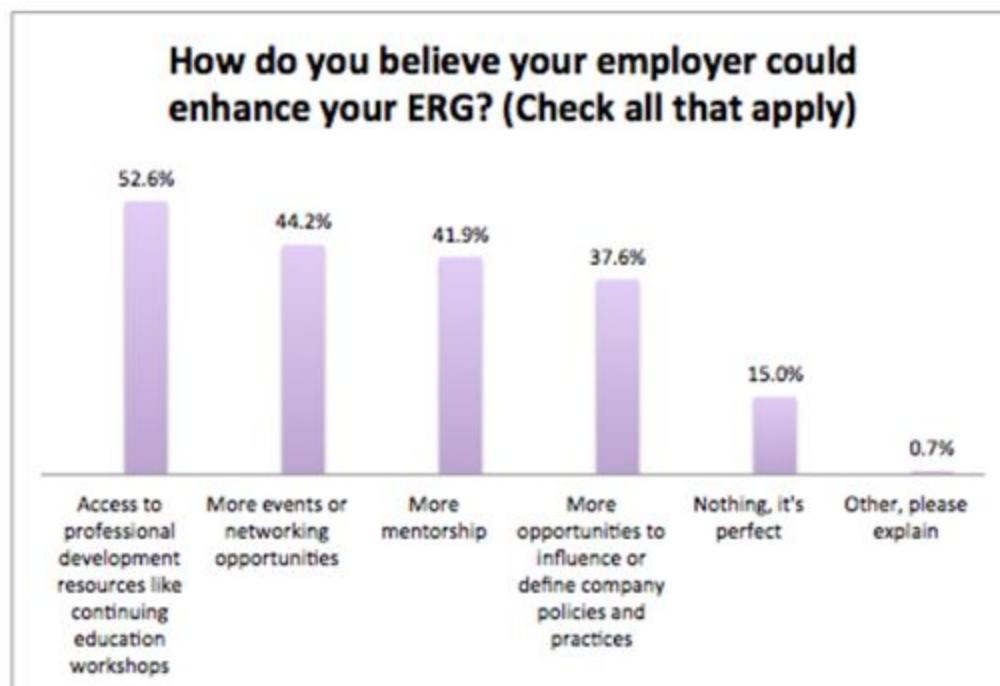
Companies have seen success in incentivizing talent referrals. For example, certain lines of business within Bank of America pay employees for successfully recommending hires. As a Bank of America representative said at Galvanize:

“If [a company hasn’t] done a whole lot around incentivizing people to make diverse referrals, perhaps stir up a little friendly competition between markets, within markets, or between lines of business to get people educated on the importance of sending diverse referrals.”

In other words, utilizing and expanding upon established referral incentivizations to help build diverse talent pools is sure to make it a higher priority for employees of every level — not just the hiring managers and senior leaders who a lack of diversity reflects most poorly on.

IX. Engaging Management and Effecting Policy

When looking at how ERGs can engage management and effect policy, many of the strategies used to engage with ERG constituents inversely apply to collaborating with management. As companies begin to realize that they perform better with more women and more diversity in general, policies aren't just "good for women" — they're good for business in general. As ERGs continue to advocate for these policies, they must ensure that the language is tailored to how executives can best process it and later apply it to their overall business strategy.



ERG participants are actively seeking out opportunities to define company policies and practices. Galvanize attendees have seen success engaging with management when utilizing the below tactics:

- **Translate the ERG experience**

Encourage management to listen to your ERG the same way that you do. As data from multiple sources shows, many members of senior management are not a part of diverse groups and may not understand what it's like to walk in somebody else's shoes. Encourage them to learn about the experiences of ERG participants and to see things from their point of view.

"Be sure you get all levels of management," one Galvanize attendee, from Merck, advised. "You

don't just want to get to the top, because we often see that there's a [gap in middle management](#). If we don't get it all the way down, we won't see the benefits."

- **Rely on data, not feelings**

It's important to listen to ERG members about how they feel, but when it comes to advocating for your objectives with management, any argument will be much more impactful when you're pulling from direct data. Use data to shape your story into one that's directly relevant to the company's long- and short-term business objectives. Though acquiring statistics may be difficult at first, continue to advocate for as much data as you're able to get. The more information you amass, the stronger an impact your advocacy will have.

"The data's the data, whether you hide it or not," the Merck representative said. "A lot of us can see it even if we don't have the exact numbers. So, when you get to see real change because someone saw their numbers and says 'Well, I thought I had a problem, but now I really *know* I have a problem,' and they take actual action — that really helps."

- **Empower each other to recommend change**

Establishing rapport and building a story around data provides ERGs with the tools they need to recommend meaningful change, but it's also crucial that ERGs empower and support one another in recommending change. This change is reflected not just in policies, but also in regards to company culture and the kind of workplace ERG members want to be a part of. When provided with strong business rationale, leadership is amenable to making major changes; it just requires additional guidance, and that's something ERGs can provide. As one Galvanize attendee testified:

"We had a great example here at The New York Times, where [the ERG here was able to influence policy](#). That certainly wasn't something I had thought about for my own ERG, but I'm certainly going to now."

X. Driving Retention

ERGs can play a large role in improving employees' experiences within the company. Oftentimes, career conversations ensuring that an employee stays occur too late, and the push to have that employee further participate with existing ERGs is similarly tardy.

For the purpose of retaining talent, the human element is clearly important. It's less about having policies in place that react to losing employees and more about addressing potential concerns in a proactive manner. Companies can do that by employing these tactics:

- **Support thoughtful conversations**

Outside of the safe space provided by ERGs, companies can do more to have preventative conversations with disengaged employees. Direct supervisors and [human resource managers](#) should be proactive and push career conversations to the forefront for high performers. In many cases, once supervisors have recognized a disengaged employee, the "stay" interview happens too late in the game.

By addressing what makes employees unhappy and exploring what responsibilities they may want to incorporate into their career path, team members will feel more supported and be more inclined to explore those interests within their current environment instead of outside of it.

- **Offer high performers additional responsibilities**

Many individuals leave companies because they feel isolated and separated from the company culture. ERGs and human resource managers can invite employees into ancillary leadership roles within their day-to-day operations to assuage this concern. For example, high performers can partake in the recruiting process, therefore taking an active step in helping create the company culture.

"How can we invite employees who might not necessarily be a part of the hiring process to be a part of the process so they feel like part of a selection committee?" one attendee, from OnDeck, asked. "That's the main conversation piece [we considered] when we thought about inclusion. If your company has high performers, make sure that folks know who they are and that they have that support so they don't lose those folks."

- **Offer recognition**

Employees appreciate having their personal and professional achievements acknowledged. It doesn't have to be public recognition; so long as the recognition is meaningful to the individual,

they will continue to feel supported for success and encouraged to stay where they are.

“Leaders and managers — when you’re tapping folks to take on new opportunities, maybe tap those people who don’t always get the chance to be a star so you’re not creating those polarizing and isolating instances,” the OnDeck representative recommended. “You’re not only helping morale, you’re introducing women and team members into new opportunities.”

XI. Conclusions

While there may not be a single, perfect solution on how to make women's focused ERGs more effective, Galvanize attendees pinpointed three general areas where ERGs and employers can improve their practices to ensure further effectiveness:

1. Listen

Executive teams must listen to the ERGs at their company, advocate for them, and represent them. ERGs must listen to their constituents and ensure that what they're asking for is in line with the day-to-day workplace issues that most affect members. Fairygodboss data shows that ERGs can be an effective professional and personal resource, but in order for companies to continue making positive changes, listening must extend to all levels of management.

2. Advocate

It is the responsibility of ERGs, allies (including men, who oftentimes support gender equality but don't feel responsible for enacting changes), executives, and other business leaders to press for meaningful change at all levels of an organization, both on a local and global level. By reframing "women's issues" as "employee issues," we can ensure everyone is responsible for advocating for underrepresented voices.

3. Create Transparency

Women consistently report less access to senior leadership, and companies continue to restrict access to data that strengthens the case for larger pushes around diversity. ERGs can create transparency by providing open meetings, access to their calendar of events, and additional company-facing initiatives, which can then be used to bolster talent acquisition and retention initiatives. When ERGs incorporate themselves into multiple lines of business, they align with the company's overall business strategy and become a powerful tool for personal and professional development.