



MERG

Missouri Employee Resource Group

Finding the Me in Missouri

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What are Missouri State Employee Resource Groups (MeRG)?

Employee Resource Groups are a network of employees that help drive results and act as a catalyst to build a culture of inclusion. MeRGs help foster an environment that embraces and leverages the culture of employees, fosters talent growth and development, and encourages meaningful community involvement.

Background

Missouri is committed to intentionally recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. We understand that in doing so, we drive growth, fuel retention, and improve organizational outcomes. The first 60 to 90 days of employment are a critical time for any new hire and can be particularly challenging for members of underrepresented groups. That short window of time can mean the difference between whether an employee stays for the long run or leaves before the year is out.

MeRGs can provide employees with an enhanced sense of community as well as support opportunities to network with peers, gain a stronger sense of belonging, and experience mentorship opportunities. As a condition of employment, State of Missouri employees can be advocates for change, but cannot picket, form a union, etc.

Benefits of Participating in Employee Resource Groups

MeRGs provide a voluntary space for employees to gather and work collaboratively toward common goals. The groups often co-sponsor events for professional development for employees of color or other underrepresented groups, including bringing in speakers, conducting trainings, and delivering workshops. The MeRGs also can provide less structured opportunities for employee socialization and engagement. It's critical to allow the MeRG to decide its focus while adhering to the organization's principles, and mission for equity and inclusion.

Benefits for the State of Missouri

- Improve employee retention
- Increase employee engagement and talent management
- Build and foster partnerships with community business organizations
- Support statewide diversity and inclusion efforts
- Gain insight into diverse perspectives in the workforce
- Receive recommendations to improve employee outcomes
- Build peer and mentoring relationships
- Promote our brand as an inclusive leader

Benefits for Employees

- Professional Development opportunities
- Networking
- Sense of belonging and community
- Encourages relationships and influences change in the community and in the workplace
- Visibility and awareness of key initiatives
- Provide unique insights from diverse perspectives, drive inclusion and engagement efforts

Examples of Types of ERGs

- Disability
- Veteran Status
- LGBTQIA+ Identity
- Race
- Ethnicity and Culture
- Family Structures (working parents, single parents, adoptive parents)
- New Hires
- Age (recent graduates, Millennials, over-60)

How to Sign Up

For additional information or to sign up to participate in a Missouri Employee Resource Group, please visit the Office of Equal Opportunity website or visit merg.mo.gov.

Missouri Office of Equal Opportunity Mission & Vision

Vision:

The Office of Equal Opportunity aims to cultivate a diverse and inclusive environment for all Missourians by centralizing the state's workforce diversity programs in order to promote a talented workforce that reflects the rich diversity of the citizens of Missouri and enhance the state's economy.

Criteria to Establish a State of Missouri Employee Resource Group

Employees who are interested in forming a MeRG must take into consideration the following criteria:

1. The group must have a minimum of 5 participants to start.
2. The group should recommend the following on their application:
 - a. Executive Sponsor
 - b. Champion
 - c. Chairs

3. Must develop a work plan that is in alignment with the vision and strategic goals of the Office of Equal Opportunity.
4. Develop group bylaws or adopt the bylaws within these guidelines and identify key leader roles.
5. Groups cannot be formed in opposition to another group.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. Do I need to have prior approval from the proposed Executive Sponsor and Champion to submit an application to the Office of Equal Opportunity?

A1. Employees do not need prior approval from the proposed Executive Sponsor or Champion to submit the proposal. Employees are encouraged to list who they would consider to oversee the group as the Executive Sponsor and Champion. Once the proposal is approved, employees will receive notifications on next steps.

Q2. How do I submit a proposal to start a MeRG?

A2. Employees who are interested in starting a MeRG must submit an application detailing how the group meets the criteria. The completed application should be sent to Office of Equal Opportunity for further review. Once approved, the Office of Equal Opportunity will notify the proposed Chairs of the group. Please allow several weeks for processing once submitted.

Q3. Do I need supervisor approval to join or participate in a MeRG?

A3. Employees who take part in any leadership role of a MeRG, such as Chair or Sponsor, must have supervisor approval to hold a leadership role since there is a commitment expectation to deliver MeRG goals during the duration of service. Employees who take part in a MeRG as a participant, non-leadership role, during their normally scheduled working time must have supervisor approval. Employees do not need supervisor approval to take part in MeRG activities on their own personal time, outside of scheduled working hours.

Q4. My supervisor has denied my request to form and/or participate in a MeRG. I am not on an oral or written performance plan to my knowledge and have not received prior discipline. What can I do to rally my supervisor's support?

A4. Employees can access resources on the Office of Equal Opportunity website. These resources are meant to help employees with the MeRG pitch and also help supervisors understand the advantages of participating in and MeRG, both in a leadership and non-leadership role. Employees must have supervisor approval to serve in any leadership capacity since the employee is expected to dedicate additional time to the work of the MeRG. The amount of time should be determined by the employee and the supervisor. Employees should also contact other ERG leadership for feedback. If the employee is unable to rally the support of the supervisor after accessing these resources, they should contact the Office of Equal Opportunity for further guidance.

Q5. How many MeRGs can I be involved in?

A5. Employees are expected to prioritize their job responsibilities. It is expected that employees will use good judgment as it relates to the ability to meet work commitments and deadlines. Employees in leadership roles should limit their involvement to the single group they are serving due to expected time commitment and responsibilities. If any employee is interested in more than one MeRG, the employee must consult with their supervisor for the parameters.

Q6. I supervise an employee who wants to participate in a MeRG sponsored professional development workshop for 4 hours on a Thursday, during their normal work hours. Is this considered paid work time?

A6. You have the discretion whether or not to permit your employee to attend this event during their normal work hours. If they do attend, please reference your Department's policy on Other Types of Leave.

Q7. I supervise an employee who wants to participate in a MeRG sponsored event that is being held outside of work hours. Do I need to pay the employee for the additional time worked?

A7. No. You are not required to pay your employee for attending an event outside of normal work hours.

Q8. I supervise an employee who wants to participate in a MeRG sponsored charitable activity that occurs during the employee's normal work day. Is the employees participation considered paid work time?

A8. No. The employee may use accumulated annual leave or compensatory time to attend the activity if it occurs during the normal work day. You have the discretion to decide whether the employee may attend this activity during normal work hours.

Q9. My Department already has an employee resource group, or groups. How are these different?

A9. The guidelines within this document only apply to statewide MeRGs are not to individual department groups. The statewide MeRGs are not meant to take the place of individual groups which may already exist. Some departments, however, do not have enough interested employees to form a group. For this reason, employees can choose to participate in a statewide group which meets their identity, needs, and/or professional development goals.

Q10. Are MeRGs required to maintain an up-to-date list of participants and monitor attendance within the MeRG?

A10. Yes. If a supervisor requires documentation that their employee did in fact participate in an activity while being paid, the MeRG Chair will provide applicable confirmation to the supervisor without divulging the information about other participants.

Employee Resource Group Bylaws

Article 1: Purpose

Statewide Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are a network of employees that help drive results and act as a catalyst to build a culture of inclusion and diversity across the state of Missouri. Statewide ERGs understand the advantages of an environment of embraces the culture of employees, foster talent growth and development, and encourages meaningful community involvement. Statewide ERGs work collaboratively to ensure that the impact is reflected through their principles and alignment with the Office of Equal Opportunity.

Article 2: Structure

All statewide ERGs shall have a leadership team comprised of the Executive Sponsor, Champion, and Chair. Employees who take on these leadership roles must receive supervisor approval to hold the position.

Executive Sponsor

The Executive Sponsor, a department head or delegate of a department head, shall provide overall leadership to the MeRG, ensuring that the MeRG is operating in alignment with the Bylaws. The Executive Sponsor shall support the efforts and initiatives of the MeRG, state in the annual work plan.

Strong executive sponsors will make the success of the MeRG a priority and personal responsibility, without taking any ownership or taking away autonomy of the group. In choosing an executive sponsor, it is important to find someone who is willing to put their own privilege and access to resources on the line for the MeRG and is personally committed to the success of the group.

Champion

The Champion, director role, shall have a commitment to the purpose of the MeRG and the commitment to advance the goals of recruitment and retention. They shall ensure that the goals of the MeRG are carried out effectively and preside and/or arrange meetings, lead business planning, as well as oversee all business done by the MeRG. The Champion shall also be the main point of contact for the MeRG Executive Sponsor.

Chair

The Chair shall be responsible for ensuring that MeRG meeting are in alignment with the vision, mission and strategic direction of the MeRG. They shall work closely with the secretary to establish meeting agendas and provide structure to the meetings. The Chair shall act as the facilitator of the meetings and address any issues raised by the MeRG.

Secretary

If the MeRG designates a secretary, a few examples of their scope can include: keeping records of the MeRG actions, taking minutes at all MeRG meetings, sending out meeting announcements, distributing copies of minutes and the agenda to each MeRG participants, and assuring that MeRG records are maintained.

Article 3: Meetings and Notices

MeRGs shall meet at least quarterly, at an agreed upon location (online or face-to-face). MeRGs should establish their own meeting schedules and notices as they see fit. It is required that MeRGs establish at least one mode of audio/video conferencing for participants who are outside of the region and/or off-site. Examples of audio or video tools are: Zoom, WebEx, Skype, etc.

Article 4: Election and Nominations

The MeRGs can determine how they want to structure the leadership terms. The recommended leadership term limits are: Champion and Secretary – 1 year term, with individuals permitted to serve a maximum of 2 consecutive elected terms. It is recommended that participants elect a Champion during the last quarter of the fiscal year, with elections being conducted annually. When possible, terms should begin on July 1st.

Additionally, Office of Equal Opportunity reserves the right to:

- Assign an employee to a Leadership Team or committee lead position of any MeRG should there be opportunities identified for employee leadership development. In said cases, the MeRG shall be informed prior to any appointments.
- Remove any Leadership Team member should they fail to meet any of the requirement listed in Article 5 and/or violate the code of conduct in any way (see Article 12).

Article 5: Leadership Requirements

Any employee serving in a leadership capacity in a MeRG must:

- Dedicate time and effort to ensure the success of the MeRG.
- Be in good standing with their manager, cannot be on any type of oral or written performance improvement plan, and cannot have received any disciplinary action within 1 year of assuming a leadership role or while holding a leadership role.
- Have manager permission to participate in a leadership role.
- Act in support of the creation of an inclusive environment.
- Be able to dedicate additional time to the work of the MeRG.
- Attend scheduled MeRG meeting sessions.
- Include MeRG leadership responsibilities in the annual performance and development goals.

Article 6: Executive Sponsorship

Each MeRG should seek to identify one Executive Sponsor. Executive Sponsors shall serve a 2 year term. Some of the key responsibilities of the Executive Sponsor will be to:

- Provide leadership and guidance to the annual MeRG work plan.
- Help remove organizational and individual barriers to achieve MeRG goals.
- Champion inclusion and diversity both internally and externally.

Article 7: Funding

At this time, any funding will be solely through approved fundraisers.

Article 8: Employee Participation

Participation in MeRGs is completely voluntary and shall be open to all employees, including part time and temporary employees. All employees are expected to prioritize their job responsibilities over MeRG participation. It is expected that employees will use good judgment as it relates to their ability to meet work commitments/deadlines, and will ensure that their participation in MeRGs does not interfere with their job responsibilities.

Employees must receive approval from their manager prior to participating in any MeRG events that occur during an employee's normal work schedule. Similar to attending any other type of paid event related to work, records of participation during normal work hours will be maintained by the MeRG. It is not necessary to maintain participation information for participants who take part in MeRG activities outside of their normal work schedule or during unpaid time.

Using Paid Work Time to Participate in MeRG Activities

Participation in MeRG activities is entirely voluntary. With manager approval, employees may use paid work time to attend MeRG meetings which align directly with their normal job duties, and MeRG sponsored professional development events such as symposiums, lectures, workshops, learning opportunities, etc., which occur during the employee's normal work schedule. Managers are encouraged to allow participating employees the opportunity to balance hours within their workweek to avoid overtime. Managers always retain the right to deny any request for participation that would result in overtime.

MeRG Activities That Are Unpaid

Participation in any type of MeRG activities outside of an employee's normal work schedule is always unpaid, unless the employee's attendance at the activity is assigned by the employee's manager or attendance at the event is otherwise directly related to the employee's normal job duties. In addition, employees cannot use paid work time to participate in MeRG related community service activities,

charitable events, or social events. However, for such events that occur during the employee's normal work schedule, employees may use accrued vacation or accumulated compensatory time. You should consult with your manager if you have questions about whether time spent in an activity or event will be considered work time.

Article 9: Events and Communication

ERGs are responsible for creating performance measures and tracking goals. Each MeRG shall determine appropriate communication vehicles and frequency. All printed materials should follow the state of Missouri's branding and template where applicable. MeRG activities are prohibited if they conflict with respectful work place objectives, statewide policies, or law.

Article 10: Dissolutions/Resolutions/Removals

The State of Missouri reserves the right to dissolve MeRGs at any time. In the event a designated MeRG leader fails to satisfy all of the requirements set forth in Article 5: Leadership Requirements, the individual will be removed from the leadership role and the Office of Equal Opportunity will appoint a new individual until time of election and nominations. Similarly, MeRG leaders may request removal of MeRG participants if they fail to adhere to the code of conduct.

Office of Equal Opportunity shall have the authority and responsibility to certify any new MeRGs. Submission of a proposal is not a guarantee that MeRG status will be granted. MeRGs shall not be used to discuss, negotiate or bargain over terms or conditions of employment or to express grievances or labor disputes.

Article 11: Bylaw Changes

Office of Equal Opportunity reserves the right to change these bylaws at any time and will communicate any changes to MeRG Champions and Executive Sponsors. MeRGs shall comply with any changes within the identified timelines.

Article 12: Code of Conduct

Employees who participate in MeRGs must:

- Conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner, and
- Comply with all applicable laws, polices, and rules.

State of Missouri ERG Application Form

Instructions:

Submit the completed form to the Missouri Office of Equal Opportunity. Once approved, a notification will be sent to the proposed Chair(s) regarding the next steps in formalizing the ERG.

Proposed ERG Name: _____

Executive Sponsor: _____

Proposed Champion: _____

Proposed Chair/Co-Chairs: _____

What is your vision?

Provide a summary of your ERG objectives and the desired goals of the MeRG.

What is your mission?

Provide a summary of who, what, and why your MeRG would exist.

Initial Work Plan

Proposed Initiatives/Goals (during a 1 year period)	Impact – How will your MeRG measure success? What are the measurable proposed goals?

Approval

Champion Approval: _____

Executive Sponsor Approval: _____

Date of Approval: _____

Office of Equal Opportunity Approval

Date Received: _____

Date Approved: _____