Workforce Opportunity Network (WON)

Mini-Survey Results on Starting Diversity Affinity Groups

April 11, 2008 by Sarah Besnoff

Member Query

In April, a WON Member Company was looking into starting diverse Affinity Groups and was looking for information on how other organizations have gone about starting this process. WON member companies responded to the following questions:

To start diverse affinity groups…

1. Did your company hold focus groups to get a pulse for any interest?
2. Did your company do a splash story on their internal intranet site?
3. Any suggestions for how to start diverse affinity groups?
4. Would you be willing to speak further with interested WON members?

Mini-Survey Results

Seven member companies responded to this survey.

1. **Did your company hold focus groups to get a pulse for any interest?**

Six companies (86% of respondents) did not hold focus groups to get a pulse for interest when starting affinity groups. Two companies further explained why they did not choose to hold focus groups and what research they chose to do instead when starting their affinity groups:

Company #6: Our company established the rational, policy and practice for affinity groups by doing industry research for best practices and then using our Executive Diversity Council (consisting of top executives of the corporation) to institutionalize the decisions.

Company #7: Our employee affinity groups are employee-initiated. Employees, typically, do their own informal survey, through word-of-mouth, to see if there is an interest in beginning a group, but the company does not hold any formal focus groups.

One company (14% of respondents) did hold corporate-sponsored focus groups before establishing their affinity groups:

Company #5: I have personally held a few sessions to get a pulse specifically for a disability network and a GLBT network.

WON Provides

An intimate, cross-industry network to connect you with your peers at other leading organizations.

A reliable source of information on:

- Diversity and inclusion
- EEO and affirmative action
- Work/life balance

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2. Did your company do a splash story on their internal intranet site?

Four member companies (57% of respondents) did not do a "splash story" on their internal intranet site when starting their affinity groups.

Three member companies (43% of respondents) did some type of "splash story" on their internal intranet site:

Company #4: Initially, all network groups did their own marketing campaigns which included: word of mouth, posters, company intranet/hotbox & e-mail membership drives.

Company #6: Our beginning of the allowance of affinity groups was communicated in internal communications paper to both employees and leaders. Within each business area's internal intranet, there is an area/ place that addresses affinity groups.

Company #7: Once a group has gone through the formalized approval process for becoming a recognized affinity group, then our diversity group will collaborate with our corporate communications team to disseminate strategic stories for the company's internal intranet, as well as department newsletters.

3. Any suggestions for how to start diverse affinity groups?

Six companies provided specific suggestions for how to start diverse affinity groups or personal testimonies about how their groups were started. Each company's complete response is printed below:

Company #1: Make sure the employees are seriously interested.

Company #2: Ours started as a grass roots movement. We now have guidelines.

Company #3: Actually it was a grass root effort on our employees' behalf and evolved into groups and then affinity employee groups. At the same time the Diversity team put into place guidelines on starting affinity groups

Company #5: Be patient. They take time to get organized and can be far more demanding on a person's time than one might expect.

Company #6: Our affinity groups are tied to the businesses and must present a charter for approval by the business that demonstrates how their charter is aligns with our business imperatives. This approach works toward ensuring that affinity groups work with the corporation vice contrary to the corporations business. Since some groups existed prior to the policy, this simply formalized those groups. In some areas, executive sponsors have been the catalyst for beginning affinity groups.

Company #7: Allow the employees to initiate the process; have the proposed group leaders to place, in writing, their business case for starting a group, description and background of the group, the goals and objectives of the group, draft mission statement, structure of the group, benefits to be realized by the company and the group.

Once groups are approved and become operational, it is important to encourage them to collaborate on things that are germane to both the company (e.g., strategic business goals – dissemination of products/services/programs to the community), or employee interests (e.g., resume writing, interviewing, presentation skills etc.).

ORC Worldwide

WON is a network of ORC Worldwide, which delivers insight to help clients thrive in an increasingly global environment. We do this through expert, customized consulting, superior data and information, and unique opportunities to network with professional peers. In addition to WON, ORC manages over 50 other employer networks, including European diversity networks.

Moreover, "executive sponsorship" of the groups will serve a company well. It sends a message that the groups are valued, and allow the executive(s) to hear directly from their employees about what is working and what's not.

Lastly, the groups should be OPEN to ALL employees (non-exclusive).

4. Would you be willing to speak further with interested WON members?

All seven responding members are willing to further discuss their companies' experiences with affinity groups. If you would like to be put into contact with the responding members, please email Sarah.Besnoff@orcww.com. Thank you again to all who responded.

The complete responses are printed below.

Member	Response
1	1. No 2. No not at the start. 3. Make sure the employees are seriously interested. 4. Yes, I would be willing to speak with WON members
2	1. No 2. No. 3. Ours started as a grass roots movement. We now have guidelines. 4. Yes, I can
3	1. No. 2. No. 3. Actually it was a grass root effort on our employees' behalf and evolved into groups and then affinity employee groups. At the same time the Diversity team put into place guidelines on starting affinity groups 4. Yes. We have more than a dozen affinity groups
4	1. No, for the US the groups were grassroots and in the UK they were corporate driven. 2. Initially, all network groups did their own marketing campaigns which included: word of mouth, posters, company intra-net/hotbox & e-mail membership drives. 3. There are many suggestions. 4. I'd be happy to speak with someone regarding setup
5	1. I have personally held a few sessions to get a pulse specifically for a disability network and a GLBT network. 2. Not a splash story although we have had communications on employee networks on our intranet. 3. Be patient. They take time to get organized and can be far more demanding on a person's time than one might expect. 4. Certainly
6	1. Our company established the rational, policy and practice for affinity groups by doing industry research for best practices and then using our Executive Diversity Council (consisting of top executives of the corporation) to institutionalize the decisions. 2. Our beginning of the allowance of affinity groups was communicated in internal communications paper to both employees and leaders. Within each business area's internal intranet, there is an area/ place that addresses affinity groups. 3. Our affinity groups are tied to the businesses and must present a charter for approval by the business that demonstrates how their charter is aligns with our business imperatives. This approach works toward ensuring that affinity groups work with the corporation vice contrary to the corporations business. Since some groups existed prior to the policy, this simply formalized those groups. In some areas, executive sponsors have been the catalyst for beginning affinity groups. 4. We are pleased to discuss our process and lessons learned with others
7	1. Our employee affinity groups are employee-initiated. Employees, typically, do their own informal survey, through word-of-mouth, to see if there is an interest in beginning a group, but the company does not hold any formal focus groups. 2. Once a group has gone through the formalized approval process for becoming a recognized affinity group, then our diversity group will collaborate with our corporate communications team to disseminate strategic stories for the company's internal intranet, as well as department newsletters. 3. Allow the employees to initiate the process; have the proposed group leaders to place, in writing, their business case for starting a group, description and background of the group, the goals and objectives of the group, draft mission statement, structure of the group, benefits to be realized by the company and the group. Once groups are approved and become operational, it is important to encourage them to collaborate on things that are germane to both the company (e.g., strategic business goals – dissemination of products/services/programs to the community), or employee interests (e.g., resume writing, interviewing, presentation skills etc.). Moreover, "executive sponsorship" of the groups will serve a company well. It sends a message that the groups are valued, and allow the executive(s) to hear directly from their employees about what is working and what's not. Lastly, the groups should be OPEN to ALL employees (non-exclusive). 4. Yes