



2021 REPORT

A Study of the Structure and Operations of Employee Resource Groups

An analysis of how 138 companies fund, structure, and operate their ERGs.

Survey conducted in partnership with



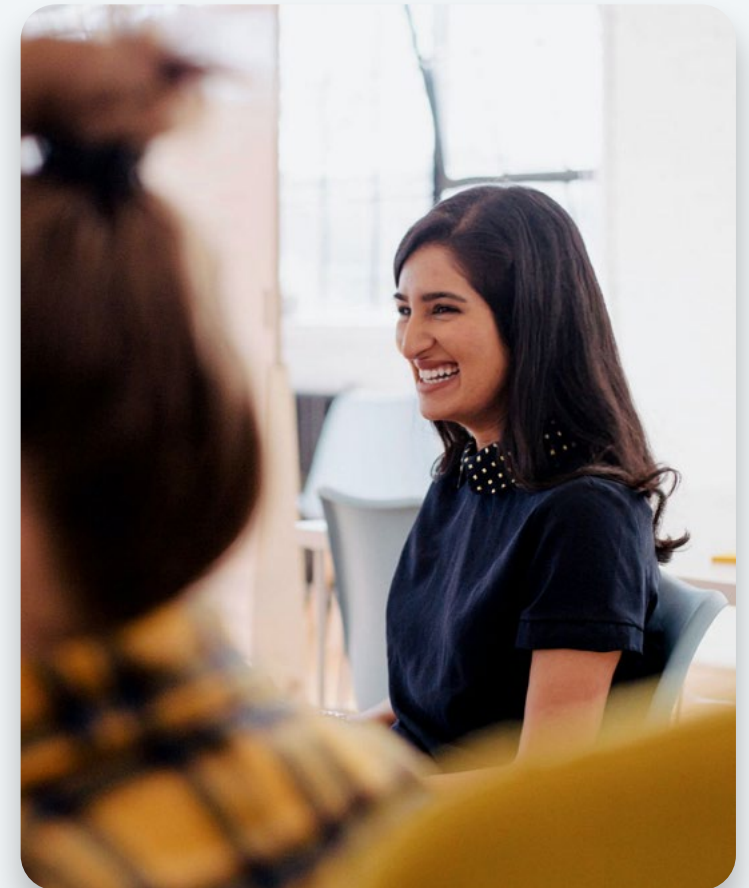
Introduction

The events of 2020 and 2021 have forced companies around the globe to grapple with and champion areas previously thought to be beyond their scope and reach as a business. Corporate purpose, employee mental health and wellbeing, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), and CSR (corporate social responsibility) have all taken center stage as business leaders confront employee burnout and attrition. The realization that employees are key stakeholders¹ for a company has led company leaders to recognize that employee resource groups (ERGs) are critical tools to align stakeholder needs, shape corporate strategy, connect employees to one another for a common purpose, contribute to community healing, and advance the overall success of a company.

With this growing elevation of ERG programs came questions about how companies typically structured, funded, led, and organized their ERG programs. Many members of the Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals (ACCP) were particularly curious about how ERGs tied in with CSR and whether connecting ERGs with giving back was an effective way to engage employees and drive awareness and participation.

Salesforce, which has consistently been rated a [best place to work](#), has a robust ERG program and a strong culture of workplace giving and volunteering. With Salesforce's ERGs promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, as well as giving back, Salesforce.org and ACCP set out to research the structures, operations, and impact of ERGs in other companies.

The two organizations teamed up to survey ACCP's member community, as well as others in the HR, CSR, and DEI professions. This report is the summary of those responses in an effort to provide guidance and validation for companies just starting down this path, as well as companies with an existing foundation, to generate deeper engagement, happier employees, an aligned corporate strategy, and a stronger global community.



¹ ([Smine, 2021](#))

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Executive Summary

Since they first emerged in 1970, employee resource groups (ERGs) have bolstered the companies that champion them. Sometimes called affinity groups, equality groups, communities, or other similar names, ERGs bring employees together based on shared interests, backgrounds, or demographic factors. They foster equity and belonging, generate giving and volunteering opportunities, and positively impact employees, businesses, and the communities in which they operate.

During the summer of 2020, the [Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals](#) (ACCP) and Salesforce.org started experiencing a sharp rise in interest about ERGs as a means to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and support corporate social responsibility (CSR). ACCP members were also curious about the business benefits of ERG programs.

ACCP and Salesforce.org teamed up to collect data on ERGs to help members engage and educate staff, identify gaps in strategy, and provide the knowledge and tools for employees to be heard without overburdening the employees who have or are given ERG responsibilities. ACCP and Salesforce.org surveyed 138 companies about their ERGs to learn how they are structured and funded, what benefits they provide to the business and community, their primary purpose, and how they operate.

Key Findings



Nearly all respondents said ERGs **boost company culture and champion DEI initiatives**. The vast majority of participating businesses found that ERGs support employee retention efforts, and a majority cited recruiting and hiring assistance as benefits of ERGs.



Three-quarters of responding companies' ERGs participate in **volunteer activities**, and half **raise funds** to support local community efforts.



ERGs are primarily a **grassroots effort**, and employees often both initiate the groups and take leadership positions. However, most are not working alone or autonomously. In nearly all cases, ERGs **collaborate and coordinate** with at least one other department, and about half need approval from another department before posting internal communications.



The department most commonly overseeing ERGs is **Human Resources**, with increasing involvement from both DEI and CSR teams. While one of the key reasons for companies to have an ERG is to promote DEI, ERGs comprise a robust mix of **employee support, volunteer activities, fundraising, and local community efforts**.



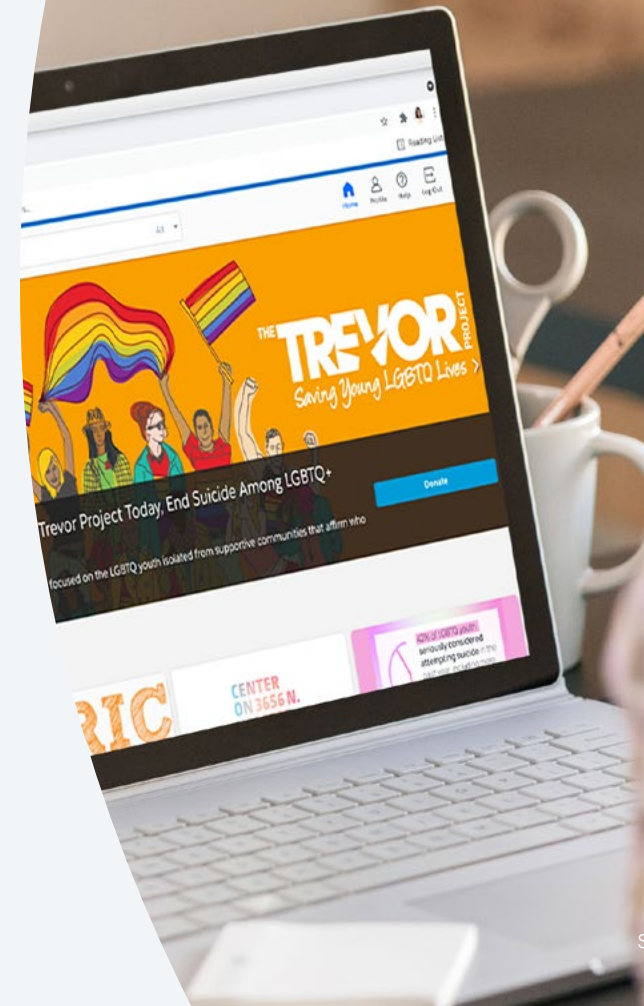
Day-to-day **leadership of ERGs** is a mix of assigned executives, volunteers (both executive and non-executive), and employees who were encouraged to take on leadership positions. While some groups are affiliated with a location, brand, or department, the majority are centrally managed and available to all domestic employees.



The most common improvements companies need are more **funding and employee participation**, followed by more leadership support, compensation or recognition of ERG leaders, and more ERG involvement in generating and creating philanthropic activities.



Public-facing websites and **third-party platforms** were viewed as the most effective channels at promoting ERG activities.



Research and Findings



SECTION 1

Survey Respondents

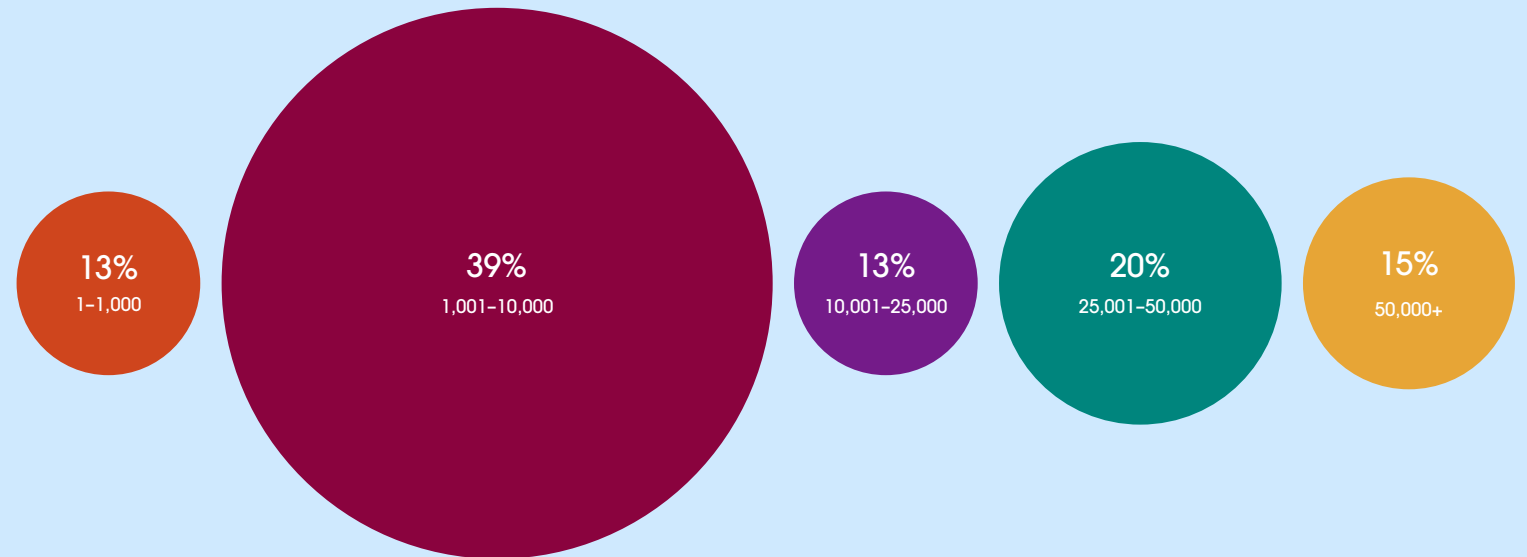
ACCP sent the survey to its audience of purpose-driven companies and corporate citizenship professionals. We received 138 total responses with 107 completing the full survey.



Company Size

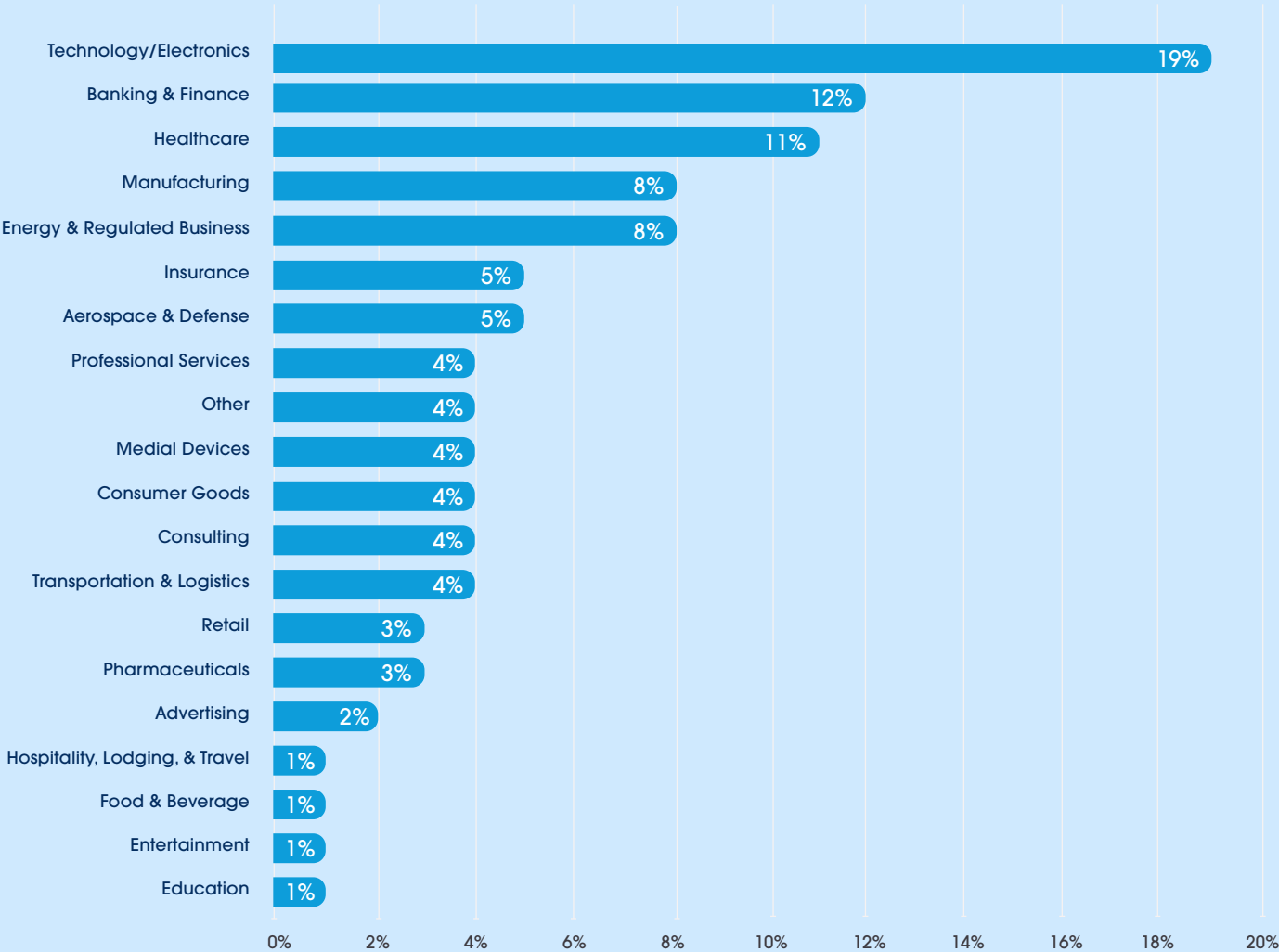
Roughly 90% of Fortune 500 companies have ERGs², but companies in all the size categories we surveyed are incorporating them into their businesses. Here is a summary of the sizes of the companies represented by respondents, based on the number of employees. All respondents were asked to have only one person from their company respond.

Company Size by Employees



² [\(Huang, 2017\)](#)

Companies by Industry



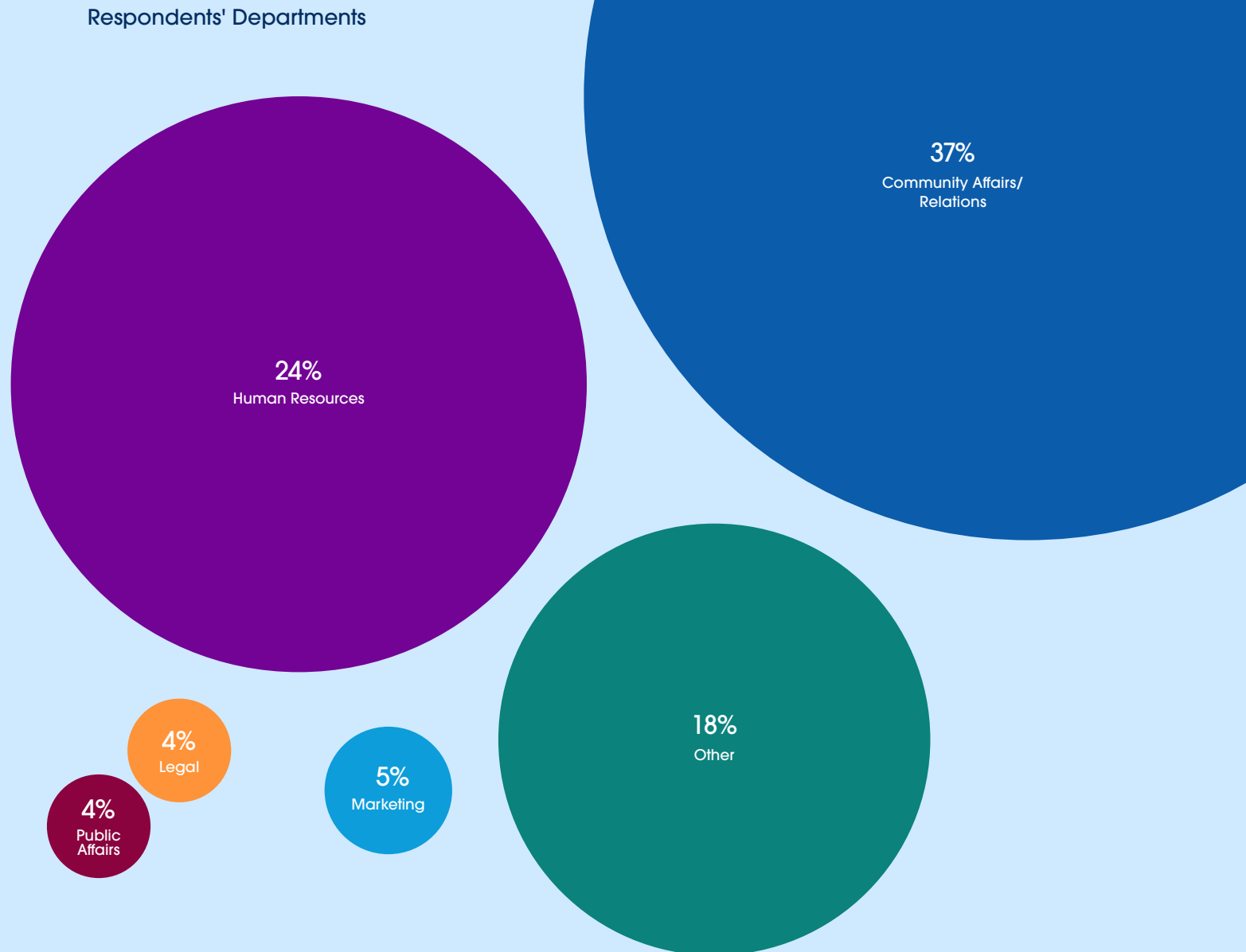
Industries

ERGs serve many functions, including aiding in recruitment, increasing employee engagement and retention, and promoting corporate philanthropy. They have emerged in the workplace as a key contributor to promoting DEI in the workplace. For these and other reasons, companies in nearly every industry are embracing them.

Of the companies polled, the largest groups of responses were from technology and electronics companies (19%), banking and finance (12%), and healthcare (11%). However, ERGs are not limited to a specific size of organization or industry.

Individual Respondents by Department

ERGs tend to be employee-driven, with ownership resting in an employee-focused team such as HR, CSR (listed here as Community Affairs/ Relations), or DEI. The individuals who completed the survey are not necessarily the ones who manage the ERG groups. Here is a breakdown of where the responses originated.



SECTION 2

ERG Structure

ERGs can be built either top-down or bottom-up. However, to be effective, the executive management team needs to support, fund, and endorse the group.³

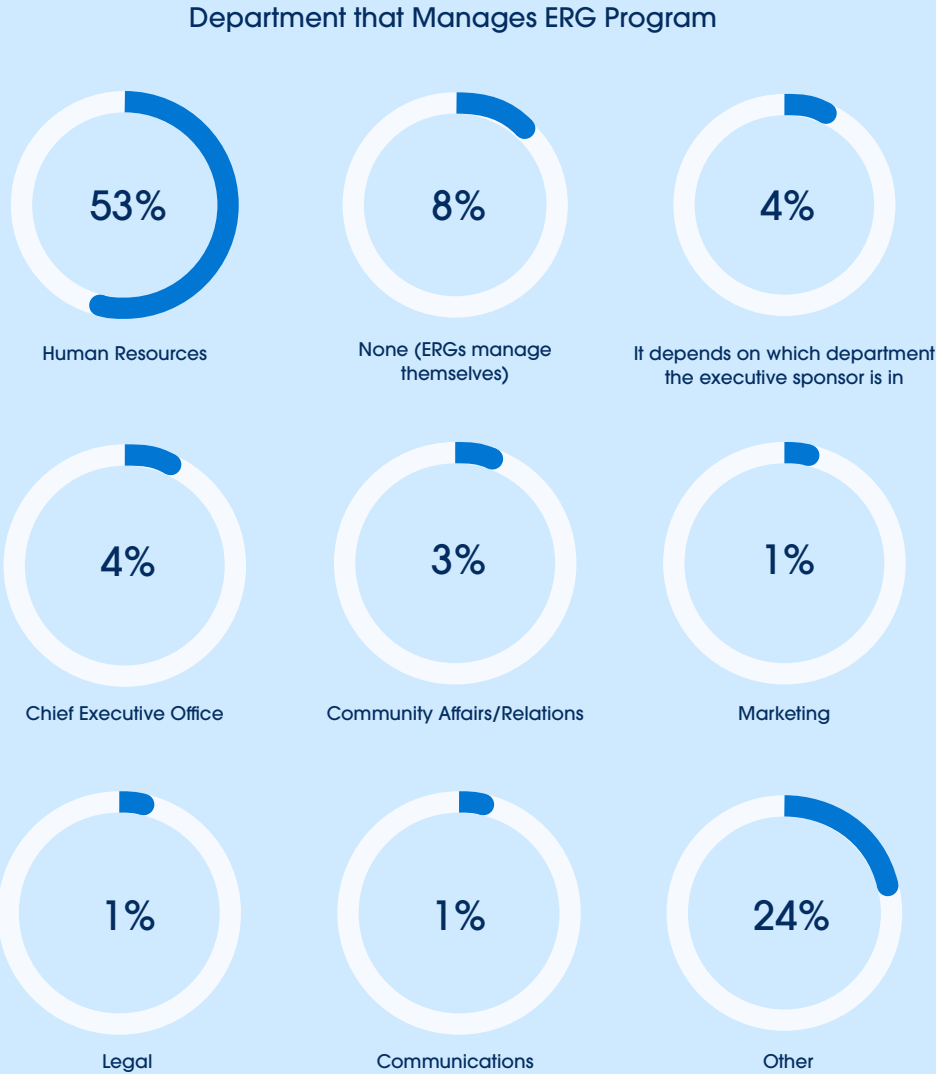
We asked about ERG structures as they pertain to the department or team that manages the ERG program, the executive or employee who leads each group, whether they're set up centrally or locally, which employees have access to them, who initiates ERGs, and the number of ERGs at each company.



³ ([Hastwell, 2020](#))

Department in Charge of ERGs

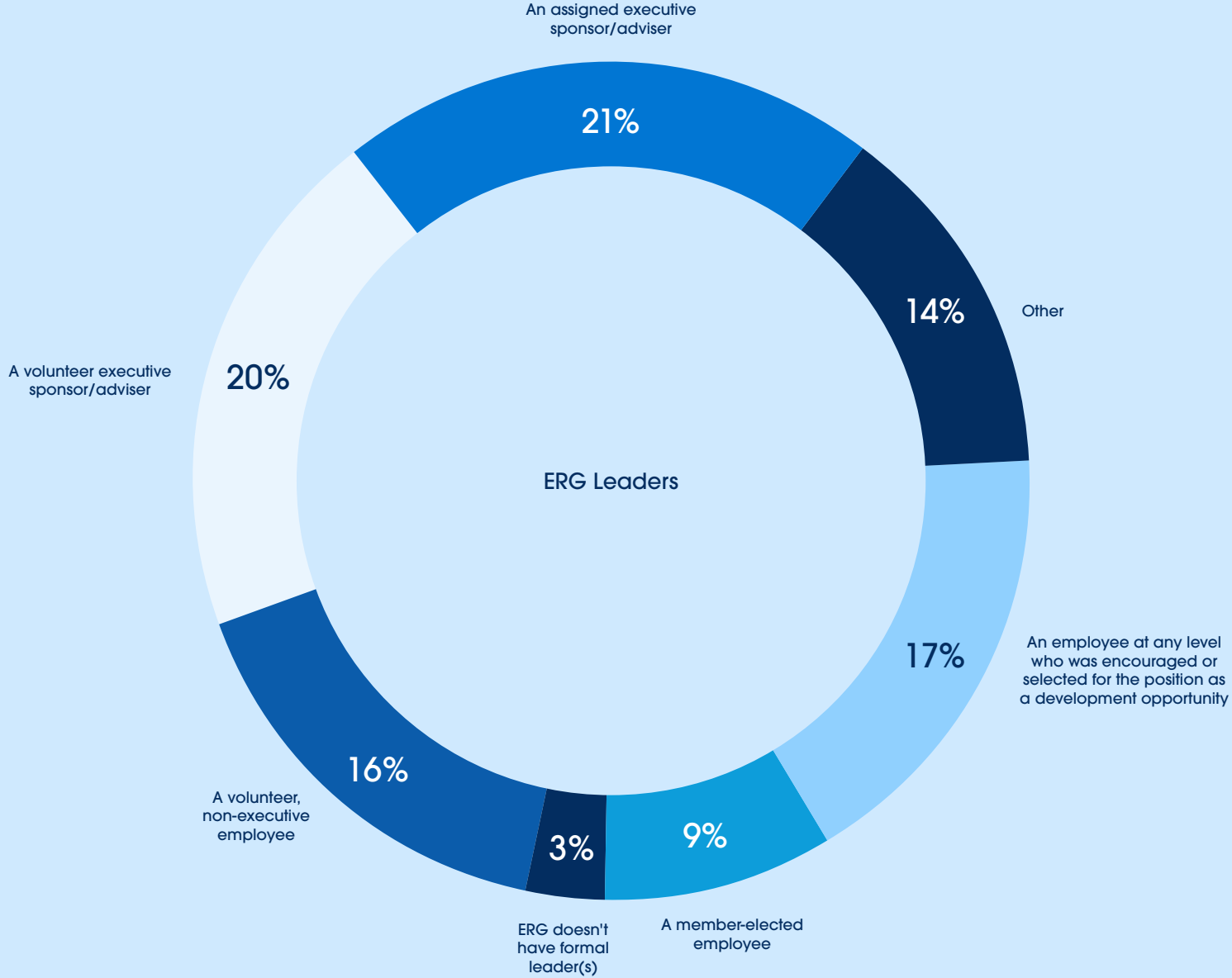
ERGs live primarily under a Human Resources function or as a standalone DEI function, with 53% of respondents indicating the Human Resources department manages their ERG program. Those in the “other” category were either in a matrix reporting system or in a sub-department, most likely linked to DEI, Marketing, or HR.



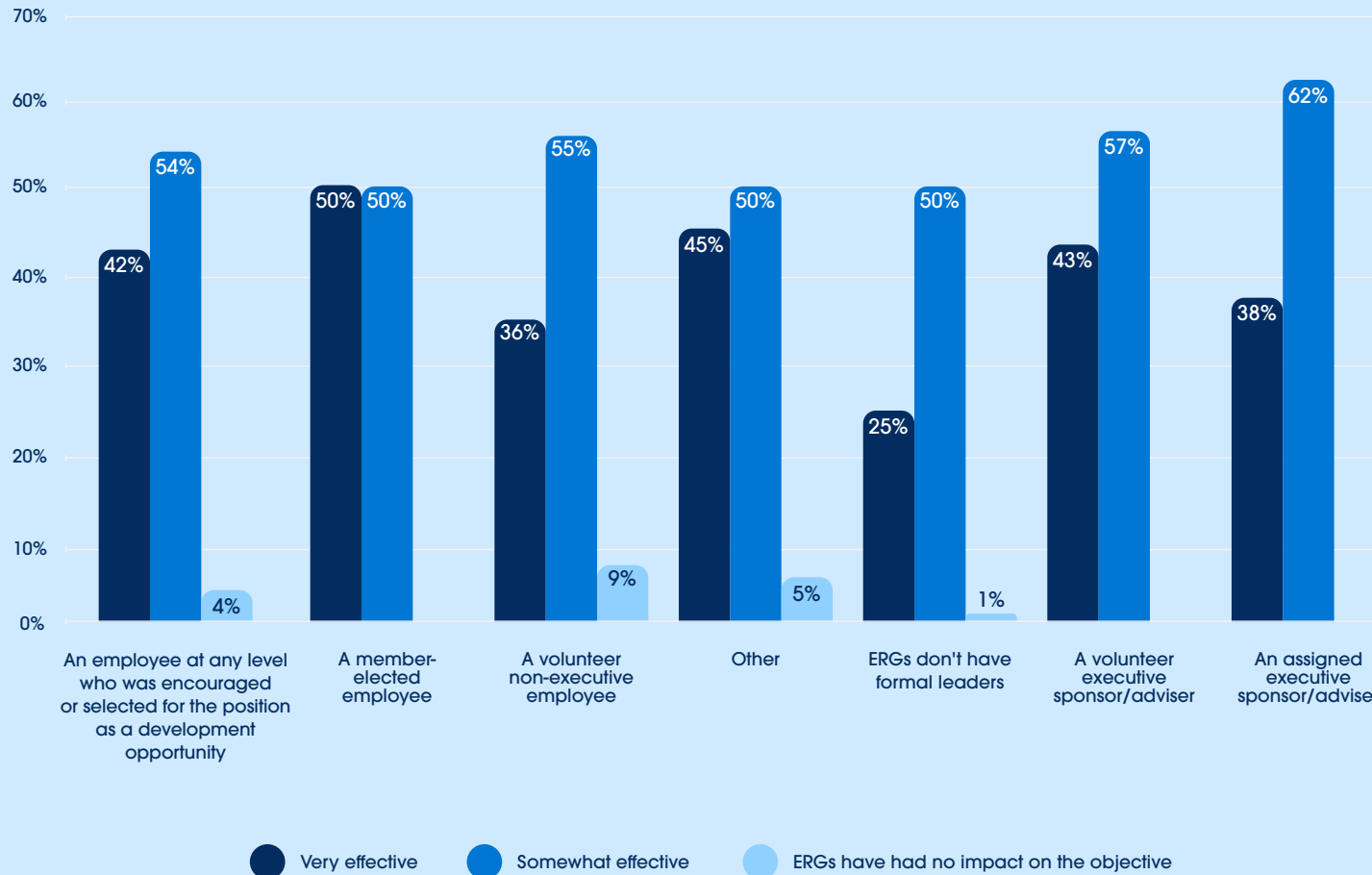
Individuals in Leadership

ERG leaders can volunteer for the position, be assigned to it, or be elected. They can be executives or employees, and it's even possible for ERGs to have no leaders at all.

Leadership is split pretty evenly between executives and employees. While 41% of respondents indicated some form (volunteer or assigned) of executive leadership, employees, whether they were elected by ERG members or selected by leadership, comprise 42% of ERG leadership.



Efficacy of Achieving Primary Objective,
by Leader Type



ERG Leaders' Impact on Achieving Goals

ERGs are often bottom-up initiatives that are encouraged and supported by leadership. For this reason, we compared answers to the question “How effective would you say your ERGs are at achieving your company’s primary objective?” with “Who leads your ERGs?” The results are mixed, but those with member-elected employee leadership had the most responses for “very effective” and the same number of responses for “somewhat effective,” with zero saying they’ve had no impact on the objective. Those run by executives (volunteer or assigned) all managed to have some impact. (See respondents’ primary objective in the ERG’s Purpose and Benefits section on [page 22](#)).

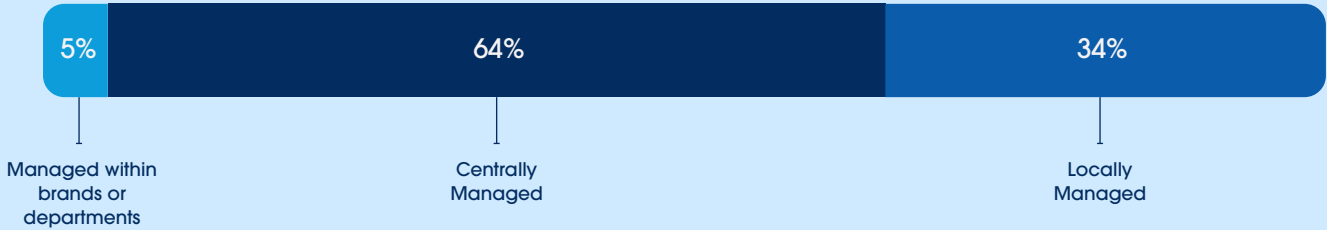
Centralized and Distributed ERGs

ERGs offer a community-based way to address DEI, encourage workplace giving and volunteering, and build a more inclusive environment. Some organizations centralize the leadership of all ERGs into one location while others manage each group locally.

For 60% of the companies responding, ERGs are managed centrally. This strategy may provide the broadest access to groups since they are all supported by the same team. This central management mirrors the feedback that 58% of ERGs are available to all domestic employees at any location.

Sixty-seven percent of the companies polled have offices outside of the United States, but only 37% of total respondents currently include international employees in their ERGs. Similarly, remote employees are included only 45% of the time.

How ERGs Are Set Up



ERG Availability

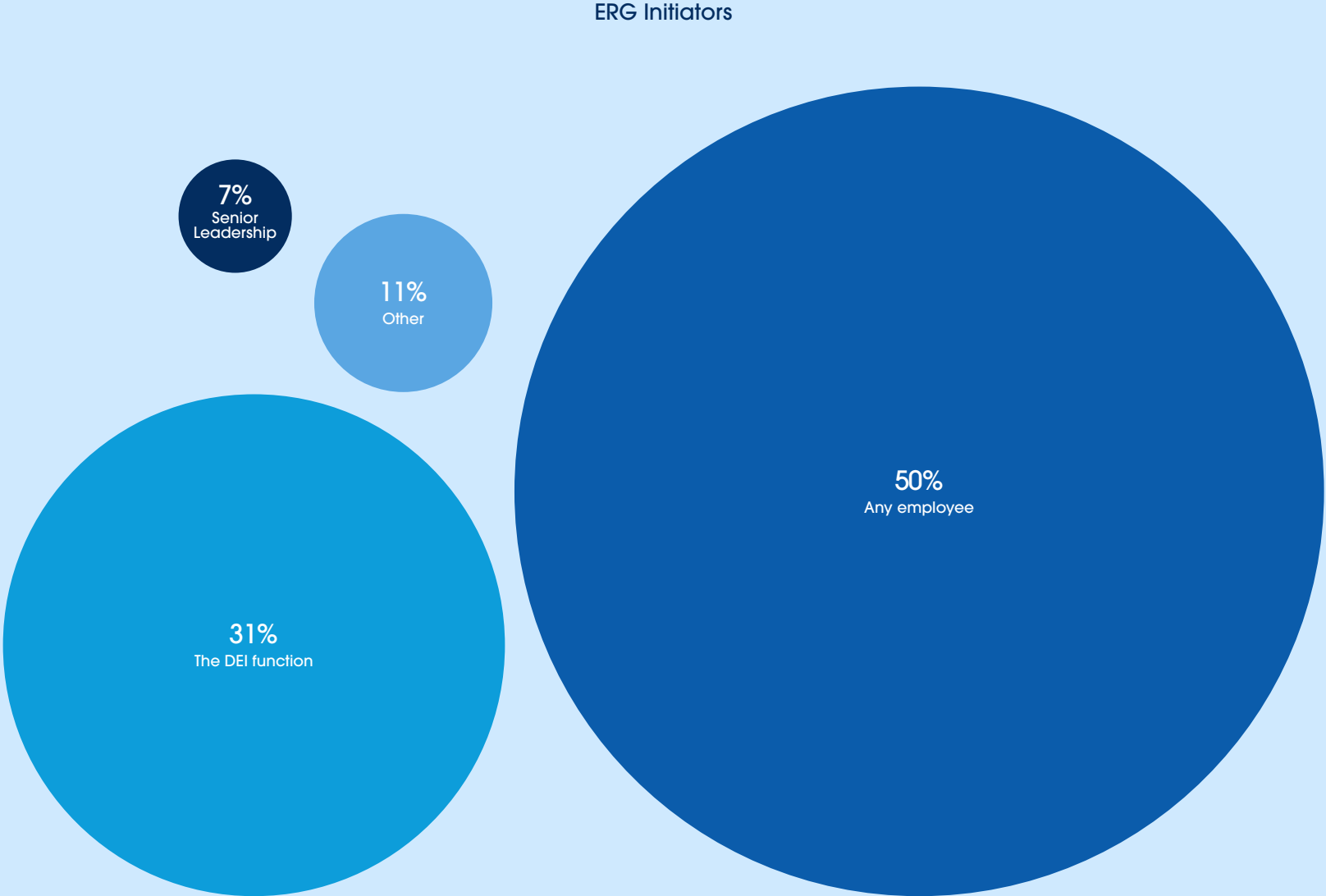


Who Initiates the Creation of an ERG

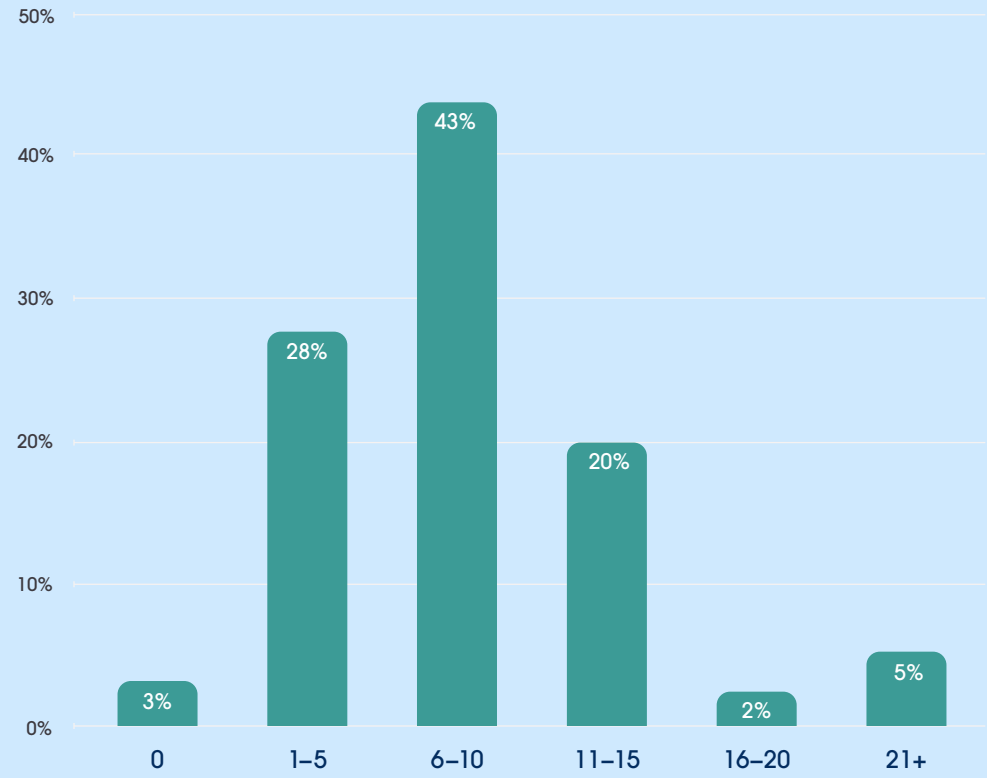
ERGs are primarily an employee-led effort. They directly benefit companies and communities, but the primary goal for the majority of respondents is to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. In line with this focus, much of the work to create new groups is done by employees.

Half of all respondents report that any employee can initiate an ERG. In most cases, however, creating the group requires finding other interested employees, securing executive support, or presenting the idea to a council for formal approval.

As ERGs are often closely tied to DEI and CSR goals, 31% of all new groups are initiated by the DEI function. ERGs build high-trust relationships that foster a sense of belonging and help companies flourish.



Number of ERGs per Company



Number of ERGs per Company

ERGs stimulate employee engagement. Many companies report having multiple ERGs, each with its own defined purpose and goals. A combined 91% of surveyed companies have between 1 and 15 groups. The numbers drop sharply after that, with the largest segment falling into the 6-10 range.

SECTION 3

ERG Funding

Proper funding and support help ERGs fulfill their purpose. Most ERGs receive budgetary and organizational support. We learned, however, that the department funding an ERG is not necessarily the department that runs it.

The group's purpose and members define who should join and what impact each group should have. The company's role is to provide resources and tools to enable the ERG to work toward and measure its success.



Funding Sources

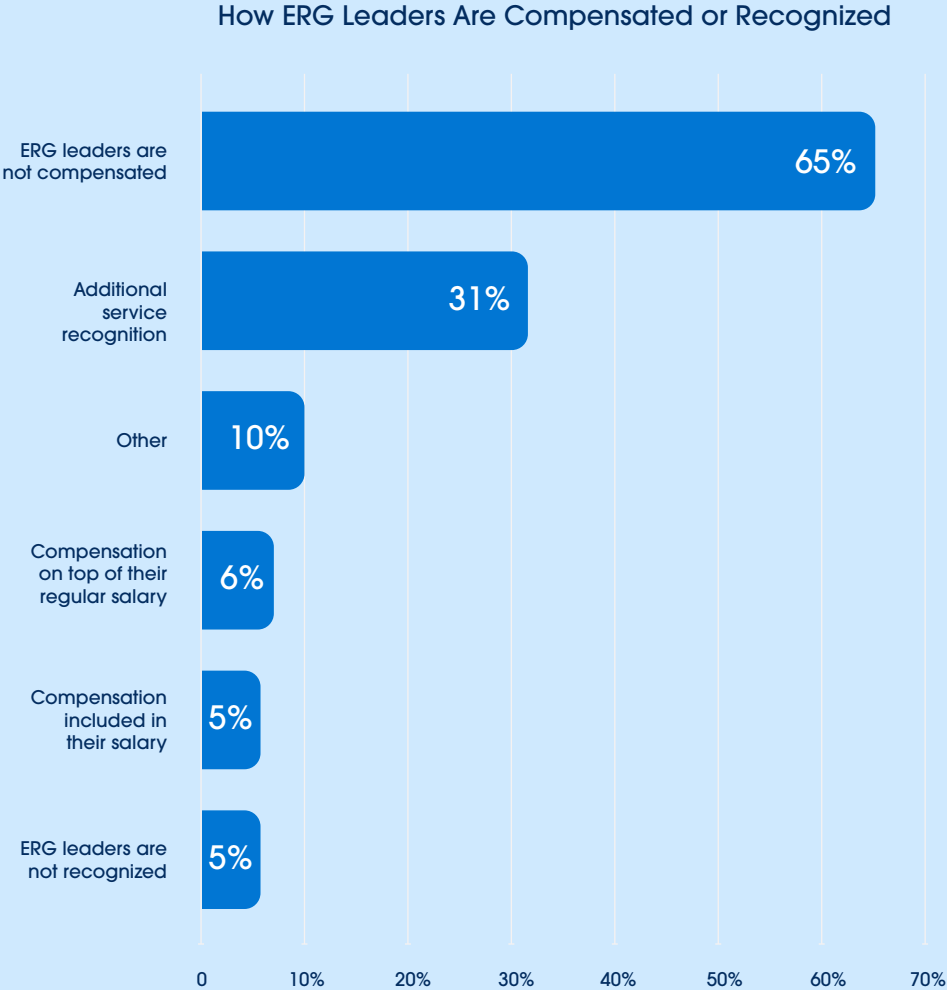
Amounts of funding allocated vary with groups, objectives, and organizations. However, most businesses clearly recognize the value of these groups, as 82% designate a budget from company funds.



Compensation and Recognition for ERG Leaders

Recognition of and compensation for ERG leaders is an area where many organizations would like to see improvement. Leading an ERG is a commitment of time and energy. Outside of meetings, leaders plan, organize, and promote events, drive membership, and manage member concerns.

Most ERG leaders are not compensated. However, many are recognized in other ways, such as awards, access to senior leadership, or gift cards.



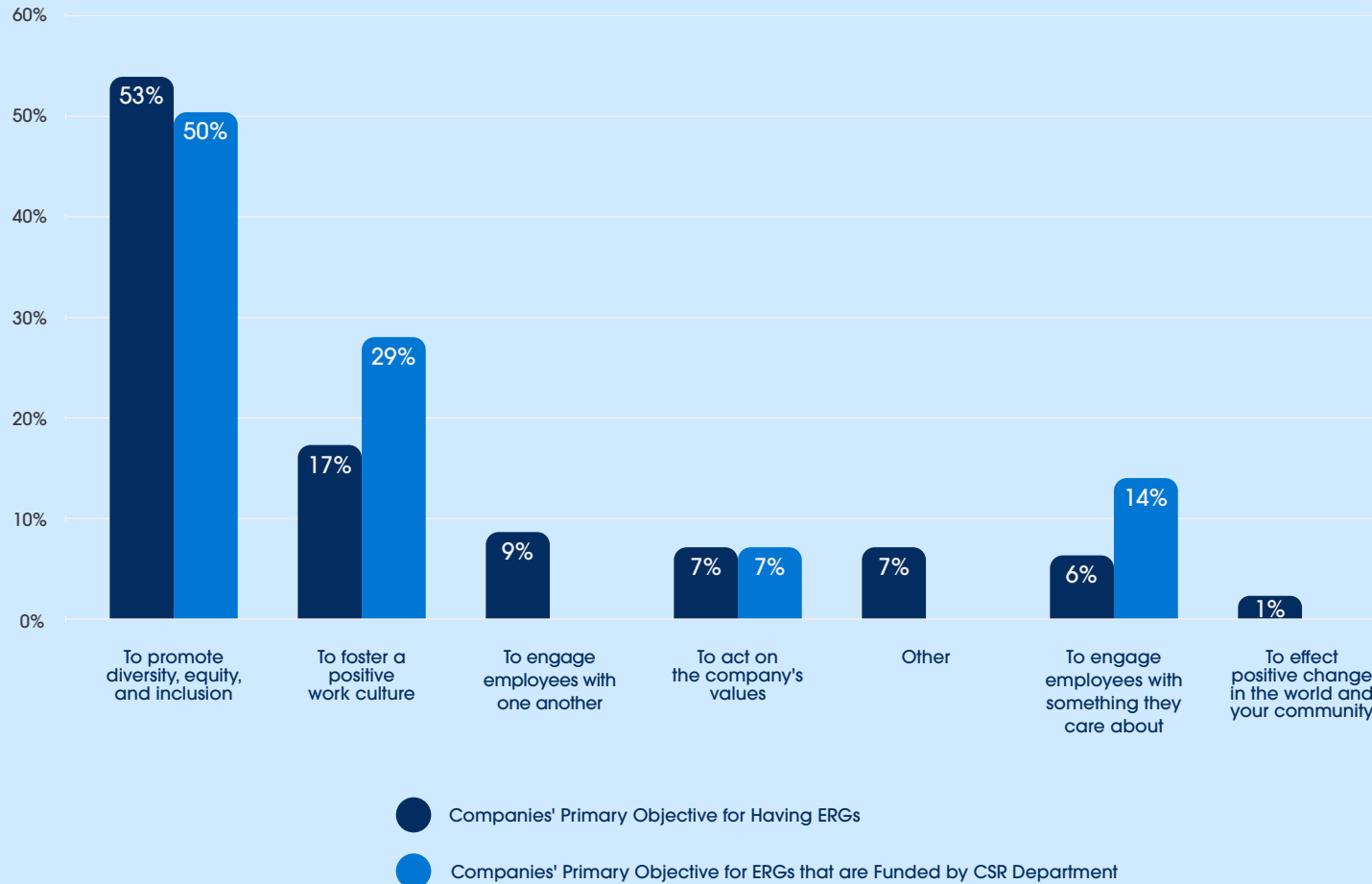
SECTION 4

ERG Purpose and Benefits

ERGs impact workplace culture. They inspire conversations and bring new perspectives to issues. Some companies even rely on ERGs to lead innovative thinking and business initiatives. Companies establish ERGs for many reasons, and their benefits often extend far beyond their initial purpose.



Companies' Primary Objective for Having ERGs and Primary Objectives of ERGs that Are Funded by CSR Department



DEI is the Primary Objective of ERGs

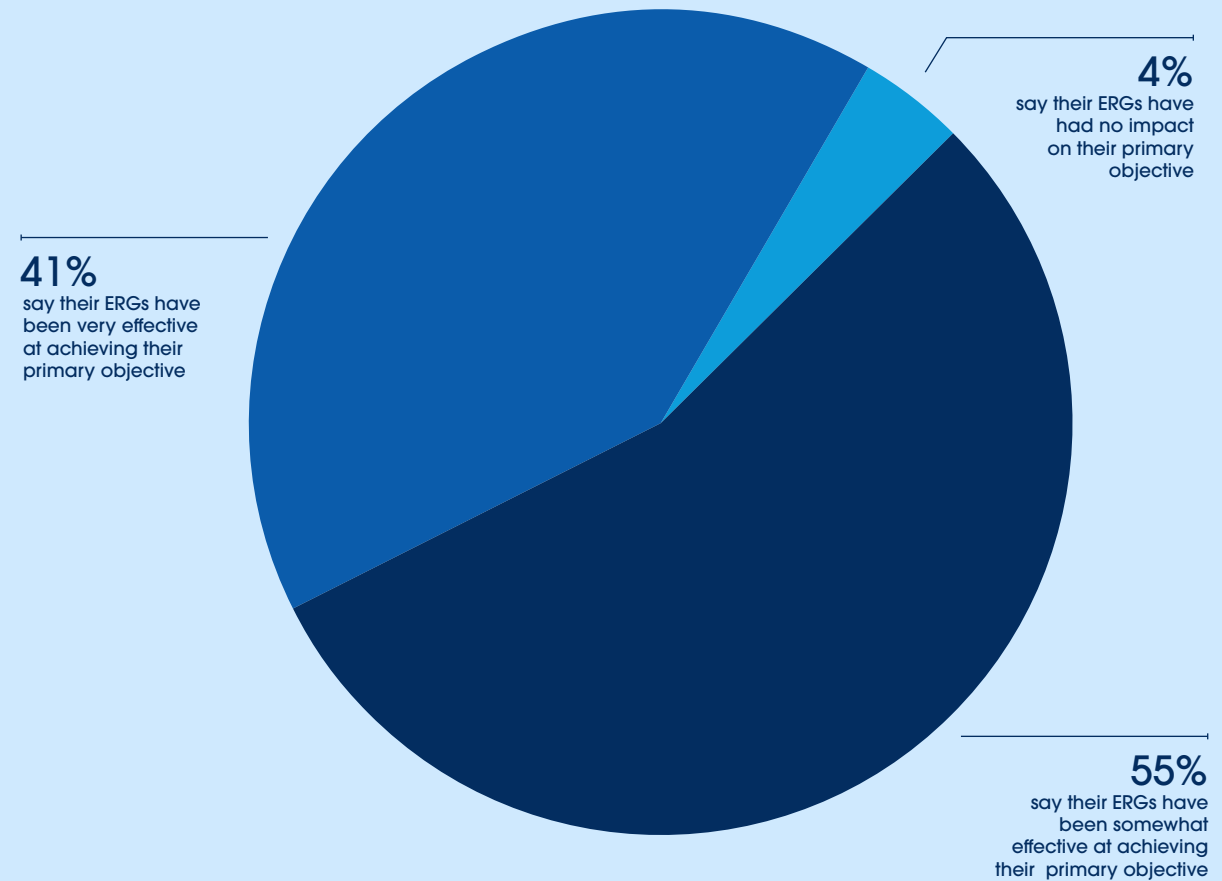
It's no surprise that ERGs and DEI are closely related, and more than half of responding businesses listed DEI as the primary objective for having ERGs. As DEI continues to be increasingly relevant, we expect both the number of companies with ERGs and the number of those listing DEI as the primary objective to increase.

Companies that fund their ERGs through the CSR department had somewhat varied responses, but none of them listed “effecting positive change in the world and your community” as the primary objective.

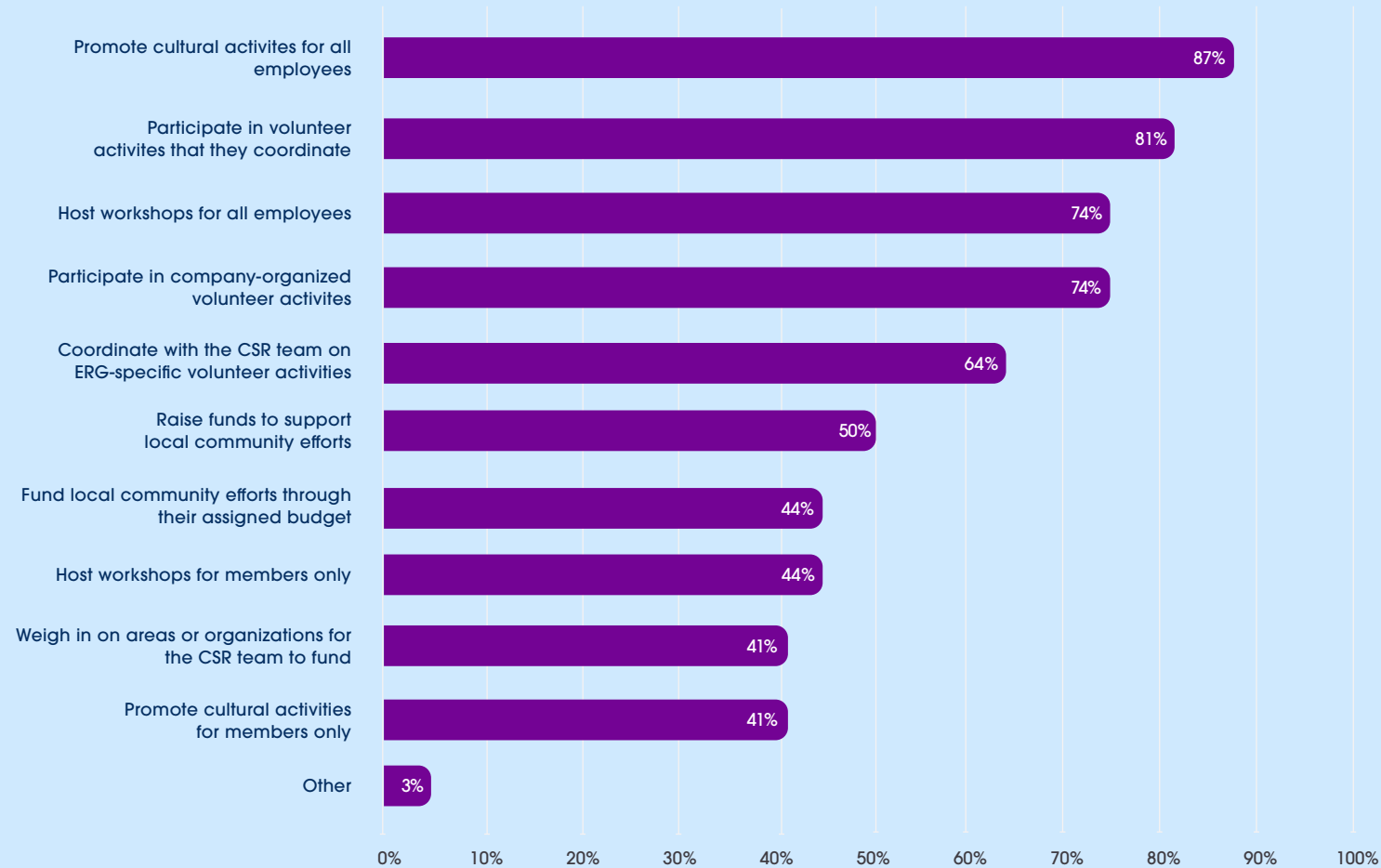
Assessment of ERG Effectiveness

Respondents were asked how effective their ERGs are at achieving the company's primary objective. The vast majority saw the groups as somewhat effective or very effective, indicating that ERGs are an effective way to achieve objectives, such as the ones listed on [page 22](#).

ERG Effectiveness at Achieving Primary Objective



How ERGs Support Social Responsibility



ERGs' Relationship with CSR

Corporate interest in social responsibility programs continues to grow steadily. In addition to contributing to a better community or world in one or various ways, social responsibility programs can boost employee morale⁴ and support greater job satisfaction.⁵

Given the primary objective of promoting DEI for 53% of organizations, it is no surprise that “promoting cultural activities” ranks as the highest social responsibility activity. Volunteer activities are also very common among responding businesses, with 81% saying ERGs participate in activities they coordinate, 74% saying they participate in company-organized activities, and 64% saying they coordinate with the CSR team on ERG-specific activities. A good portion of ERGs also raise funds to support local community efforts.

⁴ [\(O'Connell 2020\)](#)

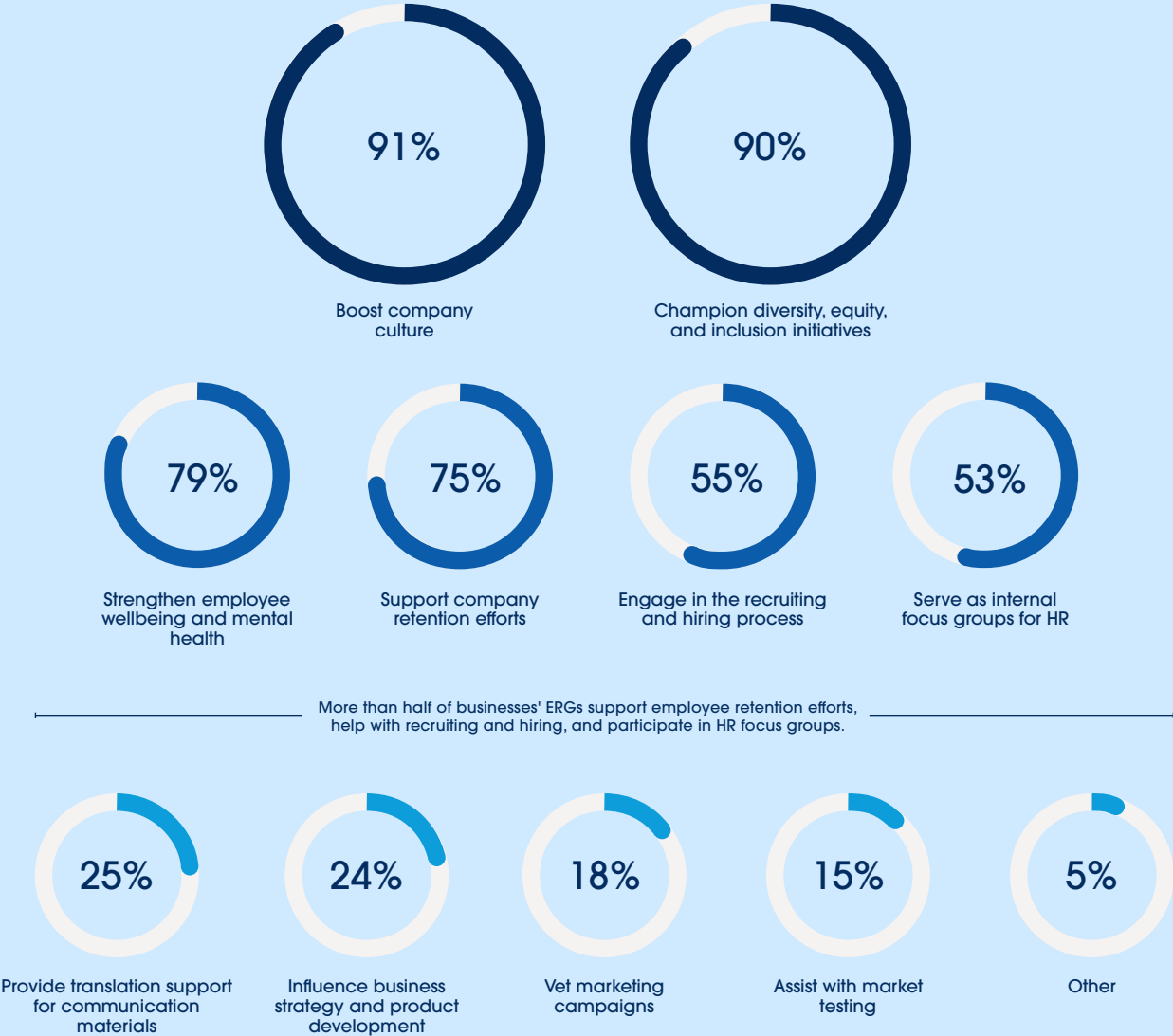
⁵ [\(Chiang 2010\)](#)

Business Benefits of ERGs

Regardless of the purpose of a given company's ERG program, benefits abound. Some benefits are part of the employee experience or the growth of individual members. Other benefits impact business results and are easier to measure.

ERGs boost company culture and employee wellbeing and assist in business operations, such as employee retention efforts, recruiting and hiring processes, HR focus groups, and business strategy and product development efforts.

Business Benefits Garnered from ERGs



SECTION 5

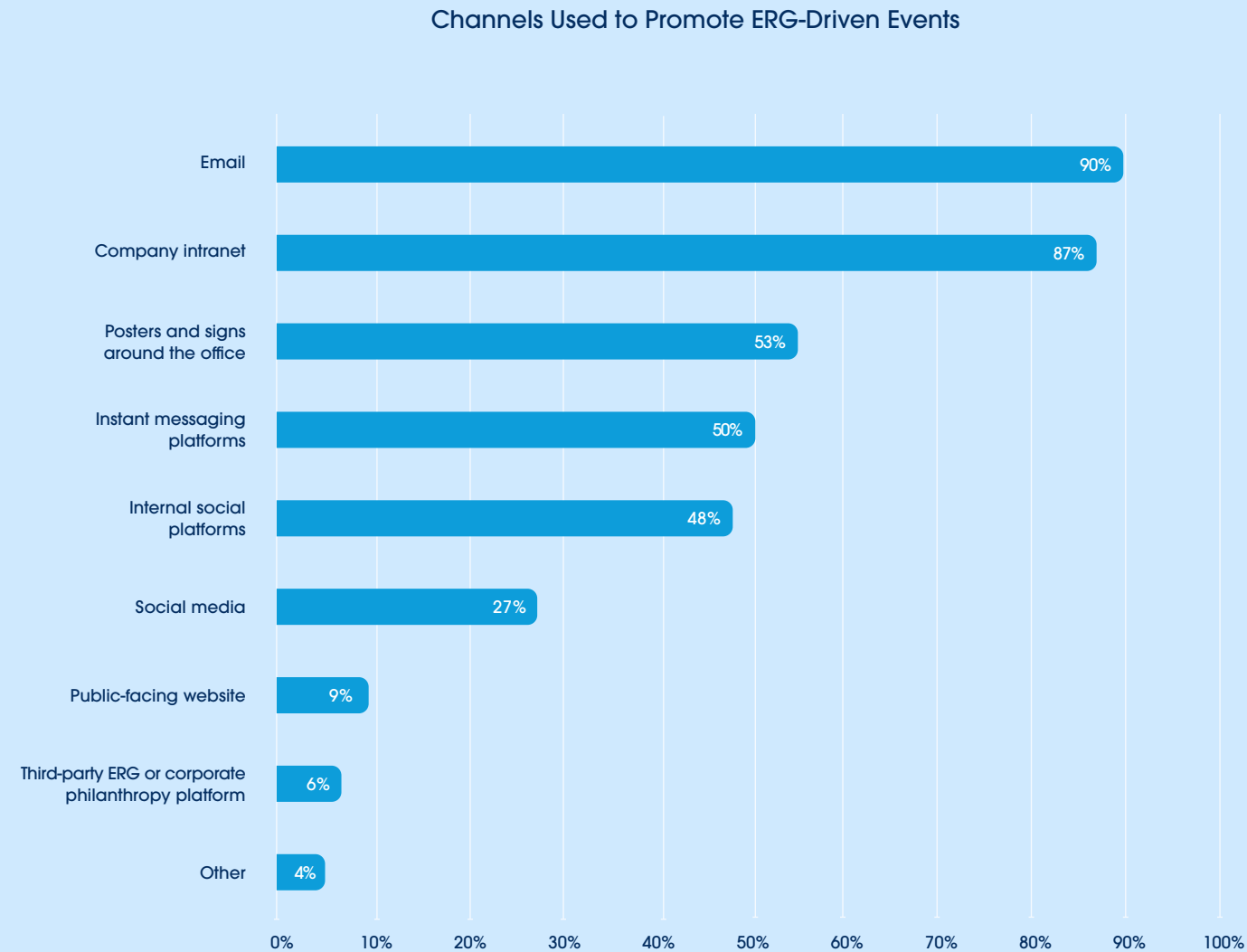
Promotions and Operations

Once ERGs are established, populated, and funded, they need a platform for regular communication to keep group members informed and engaged. The channels of communication and means of operation can directly impact a program's reach and effectiveness.

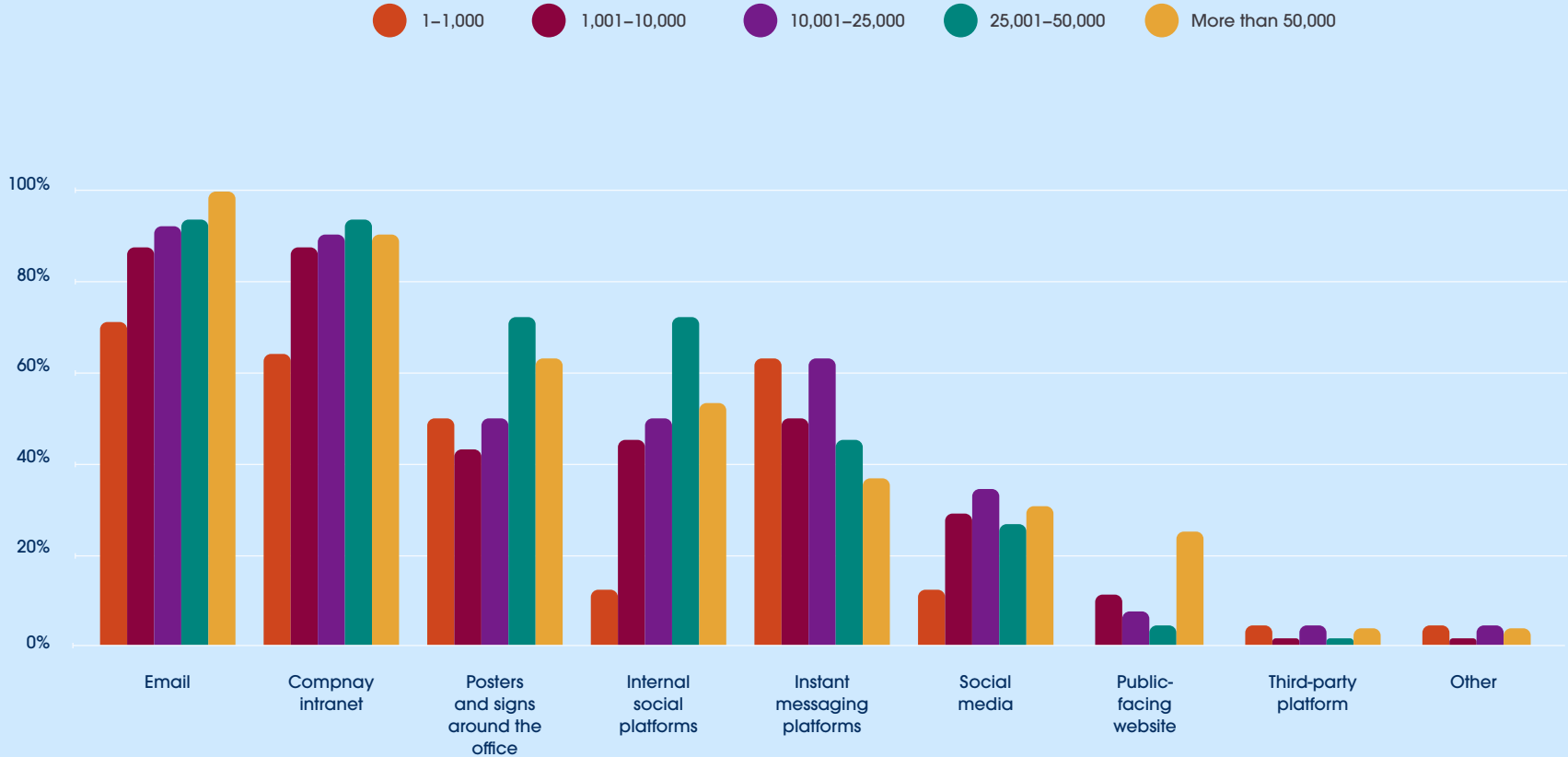


Promotion Channels

Organizations use a variety of channels to promote ERG-driven events. Most keep the promotions internal while some use public-facing platforms, such as social media or the company website, to announce ERG events. The most frequently utilized promotion channels are email and company intranet. These results are consistent across small and large businesses. However, the use of email and intranet climbed with the number of company employees. One hundred percent of companies with over 50,000 employees report using email to promote ERG-driven events.



Channels Used by Company Size



The groups most often using instant messaging platforms (e.g. Slack, Chatter, Google Hangouts) are small companies with between 1 and 1,000 employees (64%) and businesses with between 10,001 and 25,000 employees (64%). Companies with more than 50,000 employees use this channel the least (38%).

Only 6% of surveyed companies currently leverage a third-party ERG or corporate philanthropy platform. Interestingly, there was no significant trend with the size of the organization. A business with fewer than 1,000 employees is just as likely to use a third-party philanthropy platform as a company with more than 50,000 employees.

Most ERG promotions are focused internally to notify company employees, but some use public platforms to share news about events and activities. Only companies with more than 1,000 employees reported posting events on their public-facing websites. However, businesses in all size categories use social media to promote ERG-driven events.

Promotion of ERG Events

Most of the businesses surveyed do not yet leverage a centralized tool like Philanthropy Cloud for organizing ERG promotions. Salesforce.org Philanthropy Cloud is a workplace giving and volunteering platform. Depending on the size of the company and the scope of the ERGs, communication efforts to drive awareness and participation can be a challenge.

The communication channel a company uses correlates with how effective ERG campaigns are at driving awareness and participation.

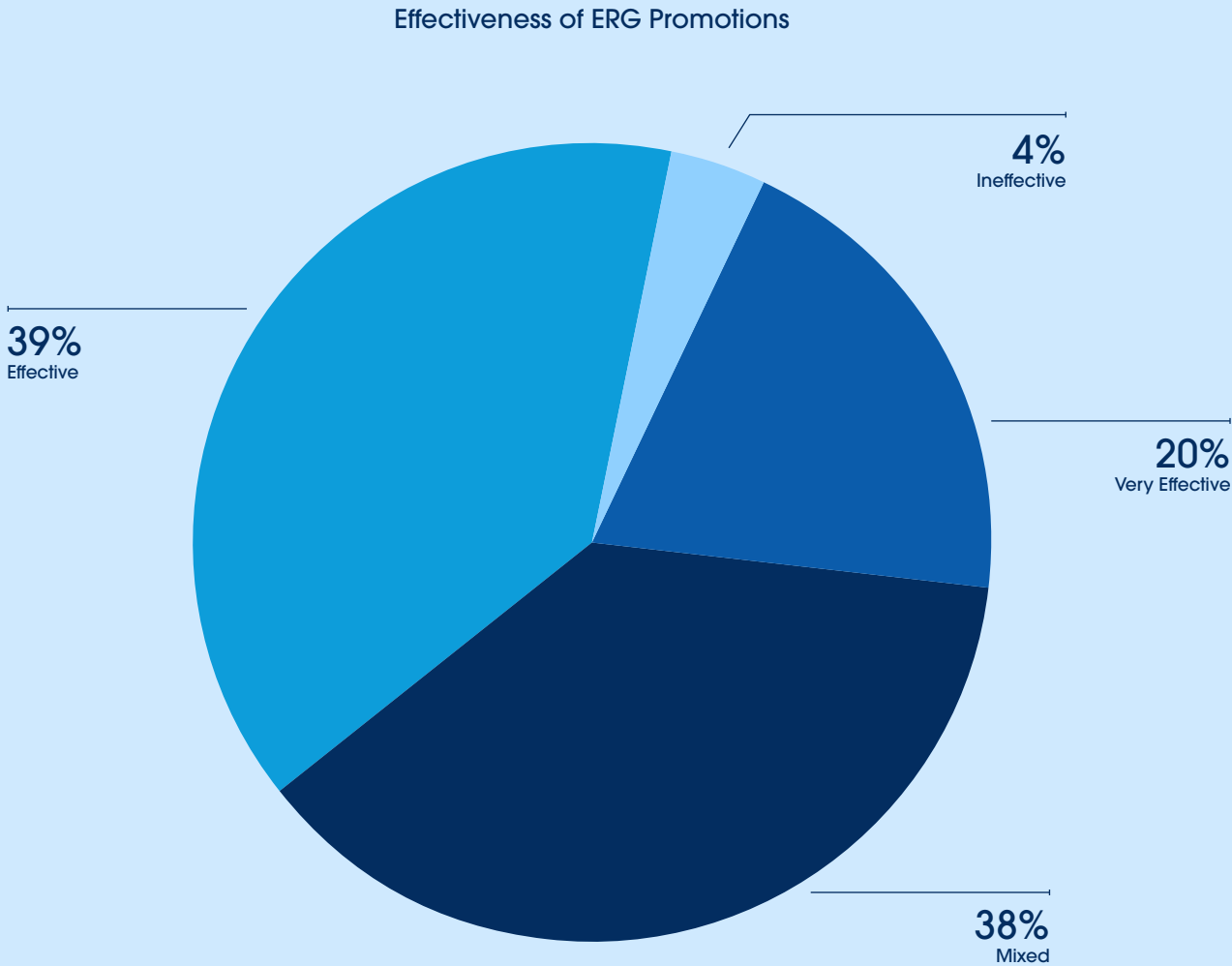
We defined each of these categories as follows:

Very effective: Awareness and participation are high.

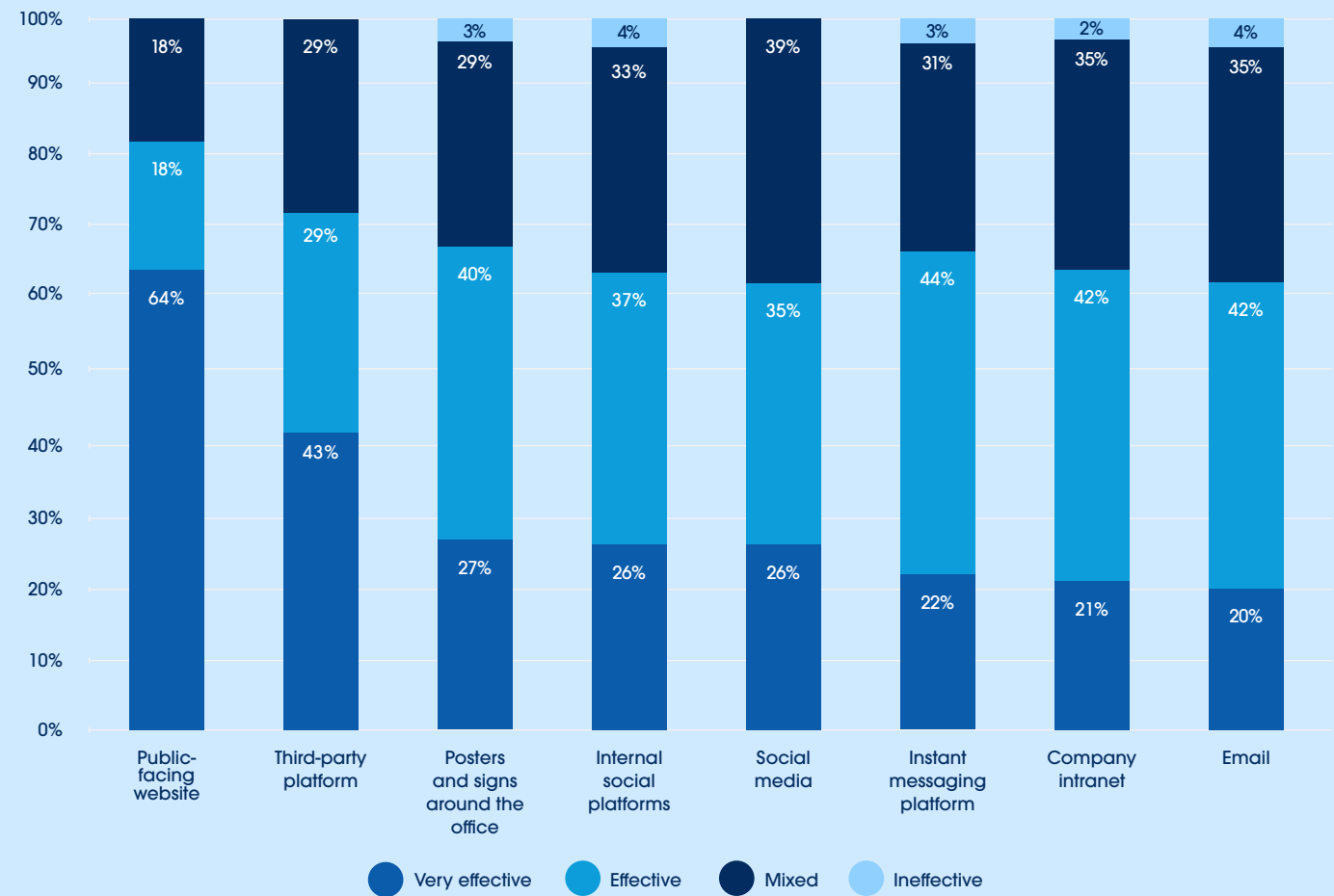
Effective: Awareness and participation are moderate.

Mixed: Awareness is high, but participation is moderate or low.

Ineffective: Awareness and participation are low.



Effectiveness of Promotion Channels

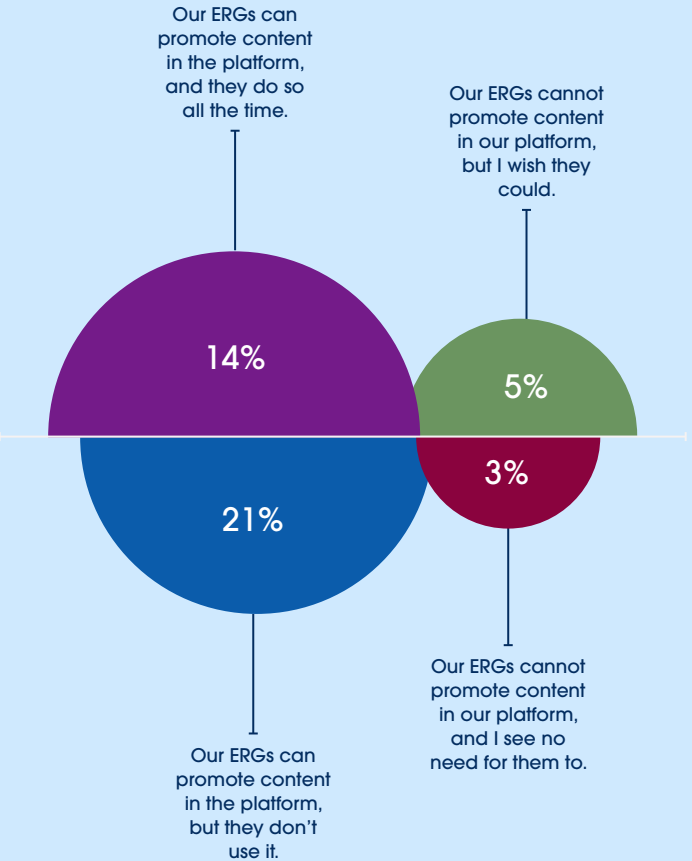


Public-facing websites were viewed as the most effective channel for promoting ERG activities, with 82% of those using public-facing websites saying their promotions are either effective or very effective.

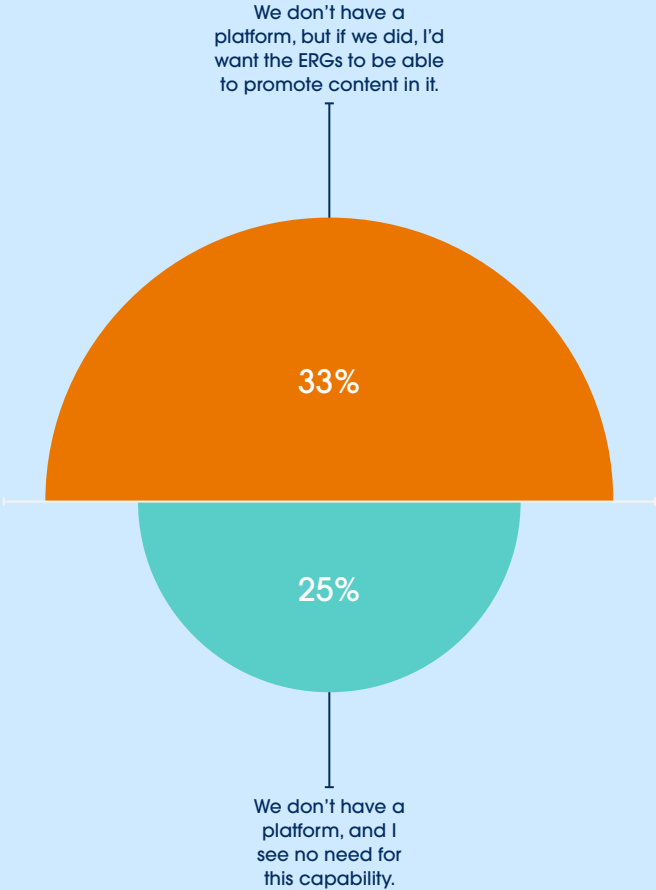
Third-party platforms, such as Philanthropy Cloud, were seen as the next most effective, with 72% of respondents using a workplace giving or similar platform saying their promotions were effective or very effective.

Those who said their promotions were very effective were the ones most likely to use a public-facing website and a third-party platform.

Those with a Third-Party Platform: Whether ERGs Can Use the Platform to Promote Content



Those Without a Third-Party Platform



Third-Party Platforms to Promote ERG Events

Although the general assessment of ERG awareness and engagement is favorable, most companies see room for improvement. The right communication platform could make an impact. Heavily trafficked communication sources, including email and instant messaging, are popular, but event announcements can easily get lost in the onslaught of daily messages.

One area of exploration is the role designated in a technology platform that gives ERG leaders and members the ability to create and publish their own content. Such a role gives autonomy to the ERGs while relieving program administrators of some of the burden of content creation. Respondents were asked whether their company used a third-party platform and if so, whether their ERGs could promote events in it.

Promotion Effectiveness of Third-Party Platforms

Thirty-eight percent of respondents who did not have the capability for ERGs to create and publish their own content in a third-party platform wish they did (33% and 5%). Of the companies with a third-party platform that use it all the time for ERG promotions, 60% report their programs are very effective (27%) or effective (33%). None of those companies say their ERG promotions are ineffective.

We defined each of these categories as follows:

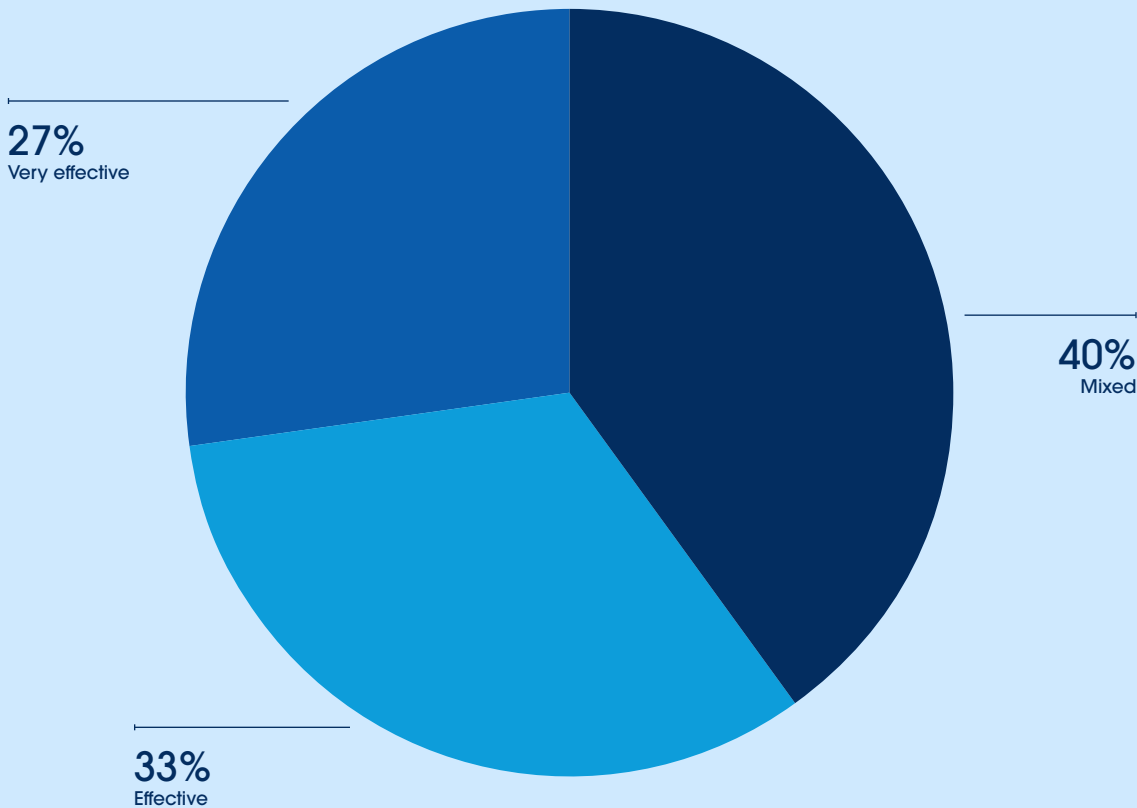
Very effective: Awareness and participation are high.

Effective: Awareness and participation are moderate.

Mixed: Awareness is high, but participation is moderate or low.

Ineffective: Awareness and participation are low.

Effectiveness of Promotions for Companies that Use Third-Party Platform "All the Time"



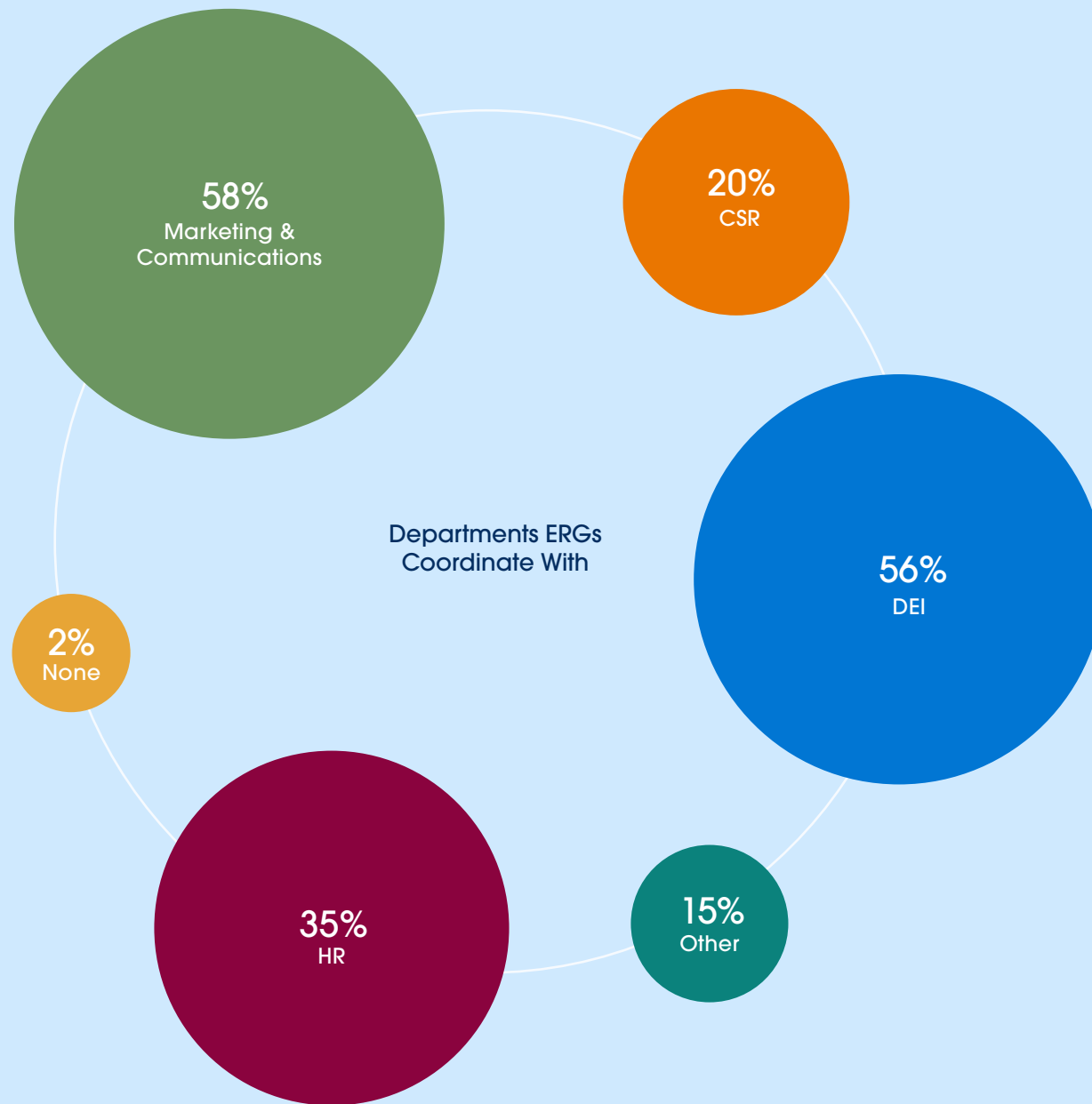
ERG Promotion Approvals

As many ERGs are employee-led or founded, it was also important to understand the approval and posting process for ERG communications. Respondents were asked about working through another department or managing their own communications. For those who collaborate with other departments, Salesforce.org's Philanthropy Cloud includes the ability for ERGs and other trusted employees to create and publish giving campaigns and volunteer opportunities within the platform. Depending on the organization's procedures, ERG members can create and then either publish it on their own or submit it for approval.

The approval process is necessary for 51% of responding businesses. Even without a formal approval process, another 41% could benefit from the ability to collaborate on content creation and promotion pertaining to ERG events and activities. Content creators could choose to work with fellow members of the same ERG, another ERG entirely, or other departments, such as Marketing, HR, CSR, or DEI.

Approval Process for ERG Communication





Departments ERGs
Coordinate With

Departments that ERGs Coordinate with for Internal Communication

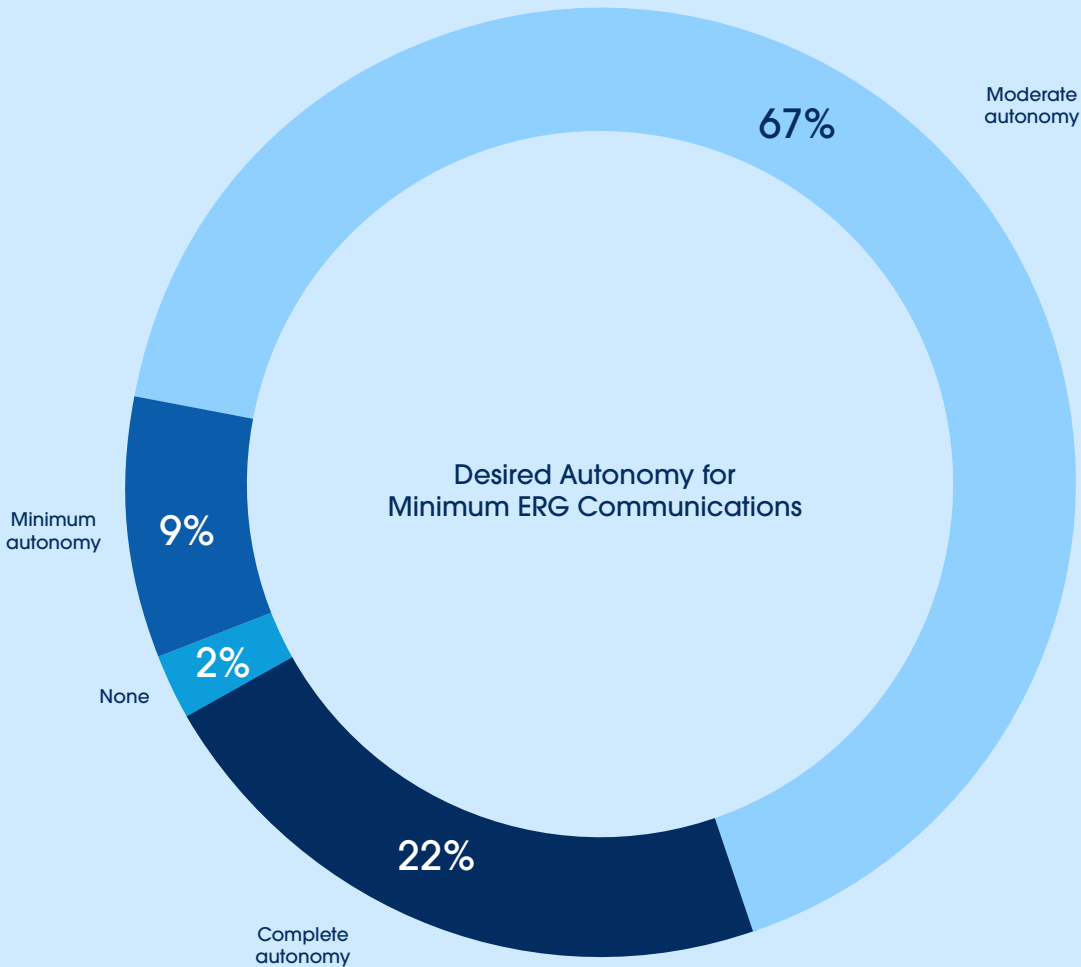
Approvals aside, 98% of respondents coordinate with at least one department on internal communications for ERGs. Marketing and Communications is involved most often, with DEI close behind.

Most Companies Want at Least Some Autonomy for ERG Communications

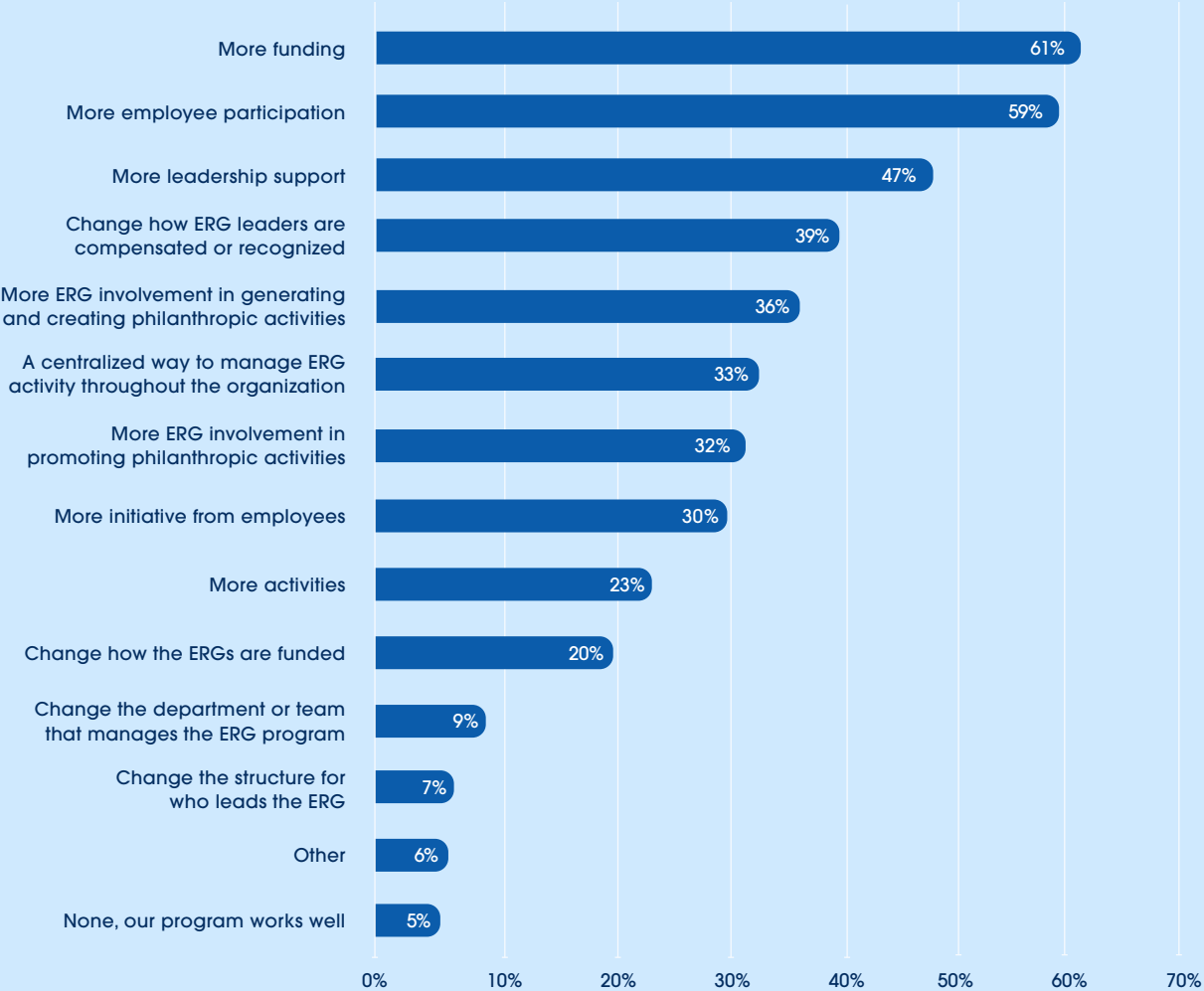
Collaboration in any organization adds a necessary layer of complexity to communications. Prior to this survey, it was unclear where organizations fell on the spectrum of their desire for control over their ERG communications. Companies were asked how much autonomy they would like their groups to have regarding internal promotions. We defined the options as follows:

- None** — All content should be created and posted through another department.
- Minimum autonomy** — ERGs influence or draft content, but another department produces, approves, and sends.
- Moderate autonomy** — ERGs produce content, but another department approves and sends.
- Complete autonomy** — ERGs draft, produce, approve, and send.

Such desires for varying levels of contribution and autonomy can help companies decide what tools and technology may work best for their companies. The 67% of companies that indicated they'd like their ERGs to have moderate autonomy, for instance, may be best served with a platform that allows ERGs to produce and save content without giving them access to an entire platform's administrative interface, which may include sensitive information. Those who want their ERGs to have complete autonomy would want technology that allows ERGs to create and publish content without approval.



Desired Improvements for ERG Programs



ERG Improvements

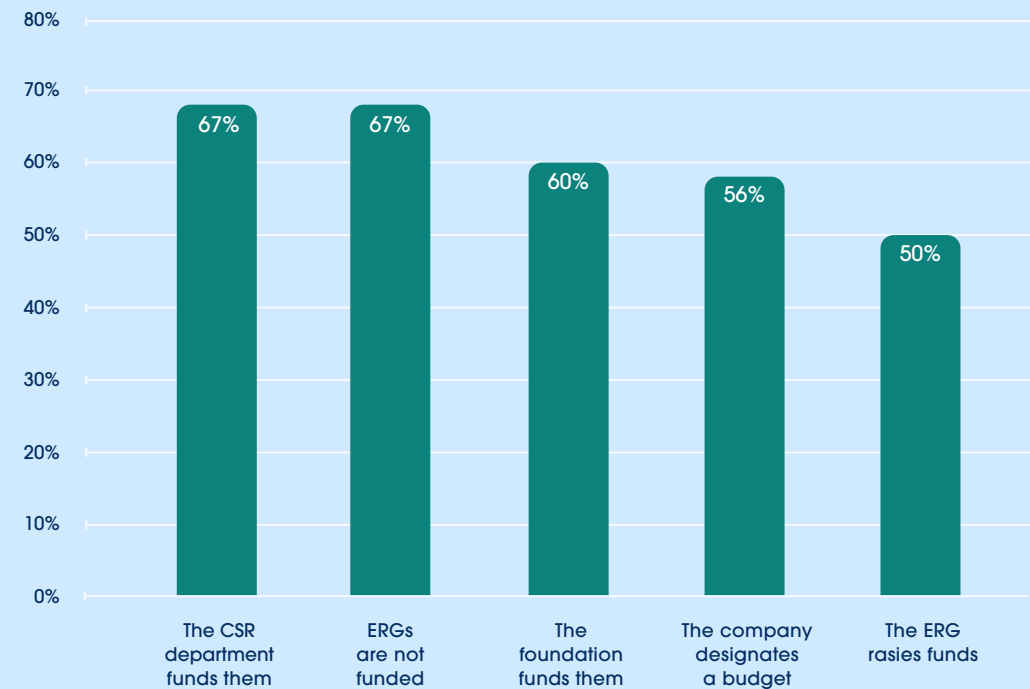
ERGs deliver benefits to employees, organizations, and communities but need company leadership support to maximize what they can accomplish. Respondents were asked what improvements they would like to see in their ERG programs.

Funding and employee participation ranked the highest, which is not a surprise. Just over a third (36%) want their ERGs to be more involved in generating and creating philanthropic activities. Only 5% of respondents said they had no improvements and that their ERG program works well. One-third of companies (33%) want a centralized way to manage ERG activity throughout the organization, like a third-party platform. A final area of improvement involved wanting more initiative from employees and more activities.

Self-Funded ERGs Had the Lowest Desire for More Funding

The most urgent call for more funding came from the organizations that fund ERGs through CSR (67%) or do not fund them at all (67%). Regardless of whether the company, the ERG, the CSR department, or the foundation is responsible for funds, at least half of respondents in each category prioritized more funding as an area for improvement.

Desire for More Funding by Current Funding Area



Conclusion



Bringing Employees, Communities, and Businesses Together

People united for a purpose have power. ERGs can be a valuable resource to companies looking to help employees build relationships with colleagues and their communities. ERGs provide a way for colleagues to gather to learn, share, grow, and improve both personally and professionally.

Inside the organization, ERG programs support a respectful company culture by reinforcing the importance of inclusion. They can provide nontraditional and nonlinear paths to leadership by giving employees opportunities to innovate and showcase their leadership skills, regardless of managerial status or seniority. By joining driven and passionate individuals toward a common purpose, ERGs create new pathways for businesses, develop future leaders, improve employee engagement, and expand market reach.

Talent is a company's greatest asset, and sometimes remarkable potential is hidden behind the day-to-day tasks of a corporate role. ERGs allow employees to contribute their expertise in an area they're passionate about or share their skills in an area that might otherwise remain untapped.

While ERGs are often initiated and led by employees, they go far beyond serving just the employees who join them. They can contribute to a welcoming and productive work environment, build community connections, amplify company values, and strengthen a company's culture.

The impact that ERGs can have on a community is substantial. The premise of ERGs is to build diverse, inclusive communities within the company. Extending that premise to the external community through giving, volunteering, and community outreach is a natural and necessary step to generating positive impact in the world.

How Salesforce.org Philanthropy Cloud Can Help

[Salesforce.org Philanthropy Cloud](#) connects employees with the causes they care about most and gives ERGs a platform to centralize their content, so they can promote their events and activities more effectively and drive higher participation and engagement. Philanthropy Cloud connects employees as donors and volunteers with beneficiaries in an easy-to-use interface and rallies them around causes they're most passionate about.

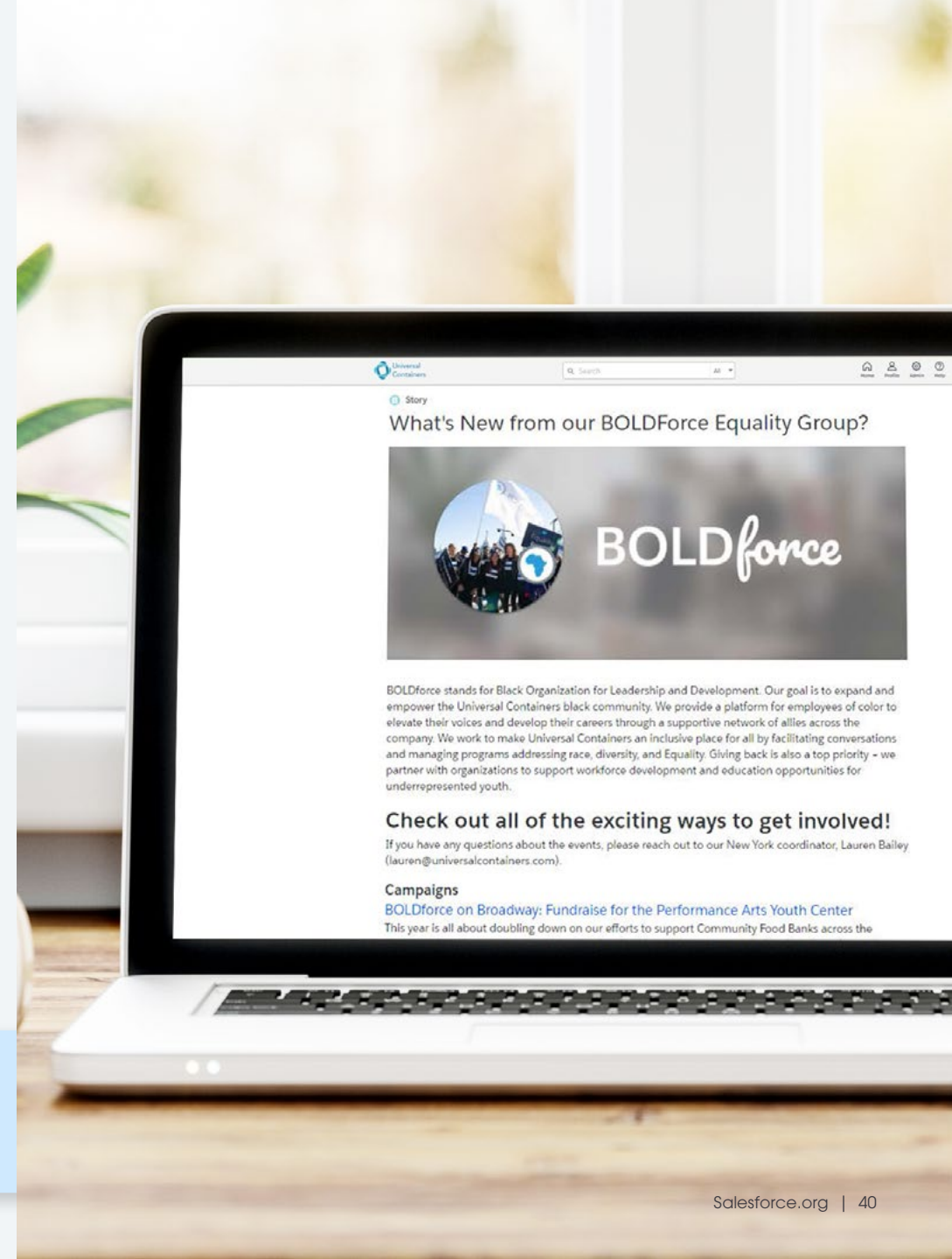
The solution benefits companies that want to transform their culture, attract and retain talent, improve their brand reputation, and generate a positive impact on the community and the world. Employees can donate their money, volunteer

their time, and request a company match – all in the same interface. Philanthropy Cloud also offers the Champion role, which gives ERG members and other trusted employees the ability to create and publish content. This role allows program administrators to offload some responsibilities while keeping reporting information private.

ERGs generate many benefits for both the companies in which they operate and the communities they serve. Philanthropy Cloud can help amplify communications, bring employees together, and empower ERGs to put their values into action and drive results for their purpose.

For additional tools or resources to get started with or expand ERGs in your organization, contact [ACCP](#) or [Salesforce.org](#).

Image: Salesforce's ERGs use Philanthropy Cloud to promote their activities to Salesforce employees. This is the page for Boldforce, Salesforce's ERG for expanding and empowering the Salesforce black community. It hosts news, activities, and campaigns in one place, linking out to various content and encouraging employee involvement.



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About Salesforce.org

Salesforce.org is a social impact center of Salesforce. We build powerful technology for, and with, our community of nonprofit, educational, and philanthropic organizations to help them operate effectively, raise funds, and connect.

In a world where digital-first is no longer a choice, our Nonprofit, Education, and Philanthropy Clouds enable organizations to increase digital engagement, create a single source of truth, and generate actionable insights. Technology helps build resilience, maximize social impact, and build a better world. Together, we can close the gap between the impact created today, and the potential for impact in the future.

For more information, please visit [Salesforce.org](https://www.salesforce.org).





About the Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals

The Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals (ACCP) is the membership association for purpose-driven companies and a career-long resource for corporate citizenship professionals. ACCP advances the field of corporate citizenship and serves as a strategic resource for its community of impact-minded professionals so that they can do the most good—in their companies, their communities, and around the world.

For more information, please visit www.accp.org.

ACCP's collaboration with Salesforce.org on this ERG report is not an endorsement of the company or any related products. ACCP does not endorse or recommend any specific CSR-related software platforms.

