

## THE STATE OF LGBT EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGS)

### Annual Survey of LGBT ERG Leaders: Challenges and Resource Needs

September 1, 2008

#### *Executive Summary*

Out & Equal conducted its second survey of leaders of LGBT Employee Resource Groups in spring 2008. Of the 258 ERG leaders who responded to the online survey, most are leading established groups looking to improve their effectiveness. Two-thirds reported that their groups are “established” or “well established,” but 44% are looking to improve and 21% are struggling. Only 13% reported that they see their affinity groups/ERGs as advanced/real leaders. In addition, nearly 17% reported that their group was just getting started. Currently, only one-half of the ERGs/affinity groups were rated by their leaders as very or extremely effective in their organizations, and over a quarter of the groups were rated as only “somewhat effective.”

ERG leaders also reported that they share some common challenges and resource needs. ERG leaders reported their most common issue to be membership interest and engagement, followed by being spread out over multiple sites, lack of monetary resources, leadership burnout, and visibility. In the comments, ERG leaders most often reported their top challenges to be competing priorities, time constraints, lack of strategic business alignment, recruiting new members, and lack of support for transgender issues. ERG leaders most frequently reported programming ideas, leadership development, and connecting/sharing with other leaders as resource needs.

Out & Equal is well positioned to assist ERG leaders in solving some of their key challenges. The Out & Equal online Professional Networks, or groupsites, hold particular promise in providing opportunities for ERG leaders to network, collaborate over distances, and share best practices around programming ideas and leadership development. When asked about their awareness of the Professional Networks, 42% of the ERG leaders skipped the question, possibly due to not knowing what “Out & Equal online groups” meant. In addition, of those that answered the question, only 15% knew about the ERG Leaders Network. Out & Equal has a clear opportunity to raise greater awareness of the groupsites, especially the ERG Leaders Network.

In addition to the groupsites, Out & Equal has several other resources to assist ERG leaders. The online ERG Registry is another tool to facilitate networking among ERG leaders. While two-thirds of respondents stated their ERG was part of the ERG Registry, there is a clear opportunity to encourage the remaining third to consider taking advantage of the free tool. In addition, the local Out & Equal Regional Affiliate program can provide a local forum for collaboration, learning, and development. Out & Equal Town Calls offer valuable education and awareness building of current workplace topics. Lastly, the annual Workplace Summit provides educational and networking opportunities to meet other ERG leaders and leading LGBT workplace advocates from around the world.

The results of this survey agree with Out & Equal’s current priorities for ERG support, and this information will be used to continue to shape the programs and resources that are developed and offered in 2009 and beyond.

## PURPOSE

Out & Equal Workplace Advocates supports Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) through providing resources, information, networking, and training. This report will further this objective by:

- Understanding the current challenges faced by ERGs and affinity groups as reported by group leaders
- Understanding the types of resources needed by ERG leaders and their affinity groups
- Gauging the current awareness of the online Out & Equal groups
- Understanding opportunities for Out & Equal to provide additional support

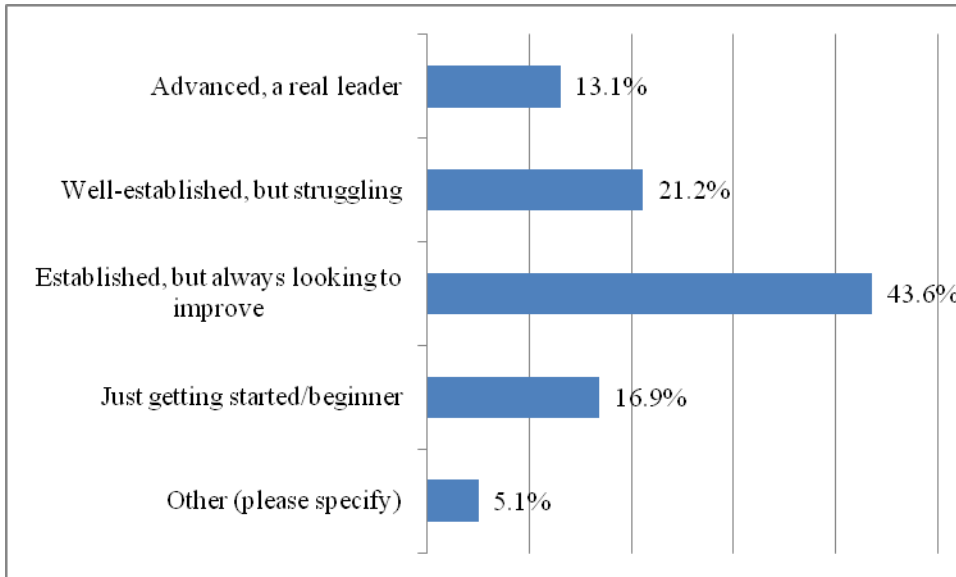
Out & Equal Workplace Advocates conducted a survey of LGBT and allied employees in June 2008 regarding Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and affinity groups. Out & Equal invited approximately 6,000 people to participate including LGBT and allied professionals, ERG leaders, executives, and employees via their global mailing list. Out & Equal received 784 total responses to the web based survey. Of these, 258 self-identified as the leader of their ERG or affinity group. This report focuses on the data reported by the 258 ERG leaders.

*Understanding the **needs of its constituents** is a priority for Out & Equal to shape its **programs and resources** in dynamic and diverse workplaces.*

## LIFECYCLE STAGES AND CHALLENGES

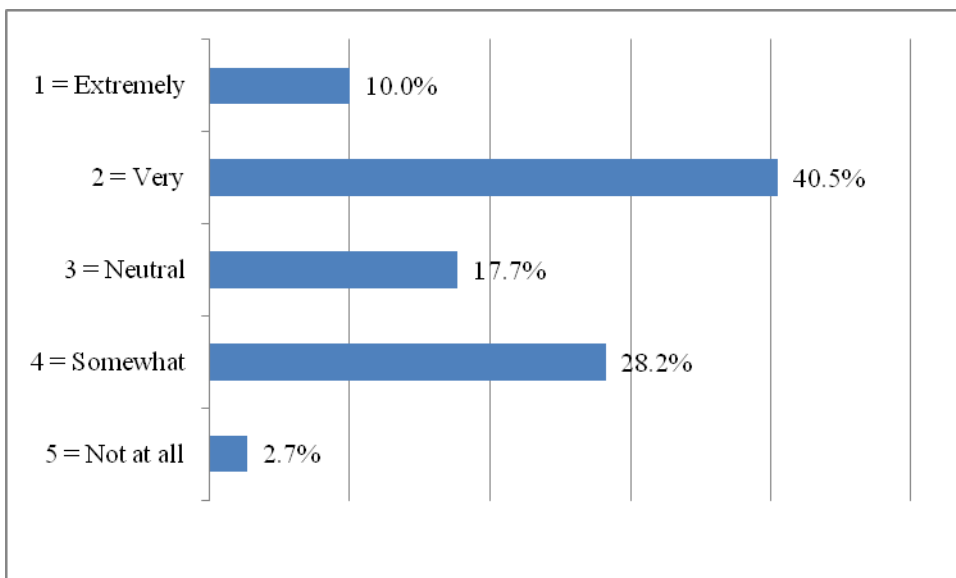
Two-thirds of the leaders reported that their groups are “established” or “well established,” but 44% are looking to improve and 21% are struggling. Only 13.1% reported that they see their ERGs/affinity groups as advanced/real leaders. In addition, nearly 17% reported that their group was just getting started.

**Question:** How would you describe your organization's ERG/affinity group?



When asked about the effectiveness of their ERG in their organizations, half of the leaders reported that their groups are “extremely” or “very effective.” However, **28% reported that their LGBT ERGs/affinity groups are only “somewhat” effective**, and 18% reported that that their groups are “neutral” in terms of effectiveness.

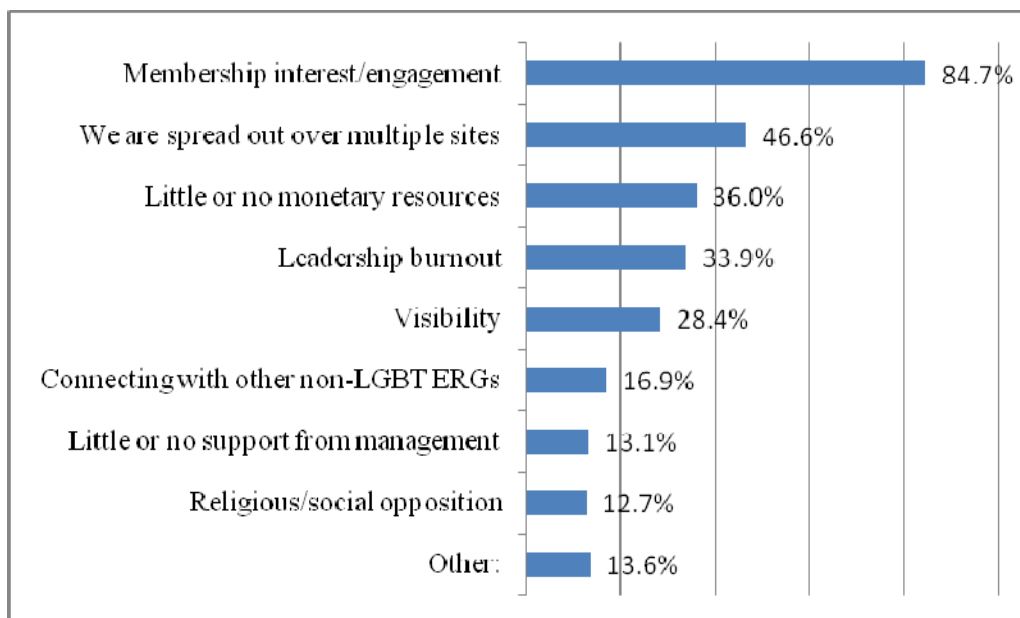
**Question:** How effective is your LGBT ERG/affinity group in your organization?



When asked about the top challenges, **ERG leaders most frequently reported membership interest/engagement**, followed by being spread out over multiple sites, lack of monetary resources, leadership burnout, and visibility.

**In the comments, ERG leaders most often reported their top challenges to be competing priorities, time constraints, lack of strategic business alignment, recruiting new members, and lack of support for transgender issues.**

**Question:** What are the top challenges that your ERG faces?



In the comments, respondents also reported a number of key themes including:

- (A) Competing member priorities and time constraints
  - “Competing member priorities”
  - “Everyone extremely busy with “day jobs”
  - “We all have other/real jobs that must come first.”
  - “Too many priorities”
  - “Participation is ‘off the clock’ (in addition to normal jobs).”
  - “Balancing work with ERG role”
  
- (B) Lack of strategic business alignment
  - “Business need of organization”
  - “Ensuring effective alignment of LGBT strategies and directions with corporate directions “
  - “Getting group officially sanctioned due to bylaws disagreement with management”
  - “Our corporate diversity department is almost exclusively focused on race and gender, with very little bandwidth left over for other diversities.”

- (C) Recruiting new membership/membership size
  - “Recruitment of new members”
  - “Obtaining new members”
  - “We're a small government entity so we just barely maintain a critical mass in our ERG.”
  - “We're just starting to build critical mass”
- (D) Lack of support for transgender issues
  - “Expanding Gender Identity/Gender Expression in EEO”
  - “No transgender support - all is gay and lesbian”
  - “Resistance to transgender inclusion.”
- (E) Not safe to come out
  - “Closeted employees due to lack of ‘safe space’”
  - “Not safe to be out for upper level employees.”
- (F) Marketing
  - “Getting marketing materials”
  - “Our company does not recognize LGBT as an official market segment like they do Asians, African Americans, etc... so it is difficult to get company support for LGBT marketing events.”
- (G) Finding allies and other similar ERGs
  - “Getting women/straight allies to be engaged”
  - “Finding other ERGs that are like ours--no one seems to be like us.”
- (H) Corporate policies and benefits
  - “Slow progress on making policy changes (e.g. Benefits)”
- (I) ERG leadership
  - “Identifying emerging leaders, leadership development.”
- (J) Lack of external community support
  - “Little support for the GLBT community outside of our business walls”
- (K) LGBT self-identification and tracking
  - “The LGBT community is unable to self-identify though we are moving this agenda within our corporation.”

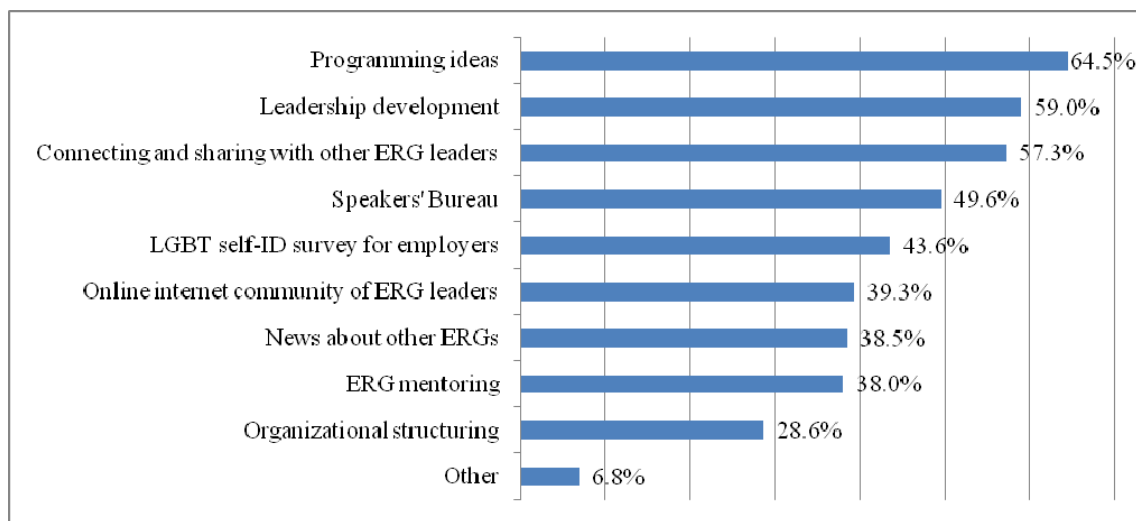
*Nearly **85%** of all ERGs report **member engagement** as a key challenge.*

## RESOURCES NEEDED

We also asked respondents to indicate what resources would be beneficial for ERG or Affinity Group leaders. Out & Equal plans to use this information in considering and evaluating existing and future support services.

**ERG leaders most frequently reported programming ideas, leadership development, and connecting/sharing with other leaders as resource needs.** The write-in comments from ERG leaders confirmed these top three and added global issues and online job opportunities as new categories.

**Question:** What sort of resources would be beneficial for Affinity Group or ERG leaders?



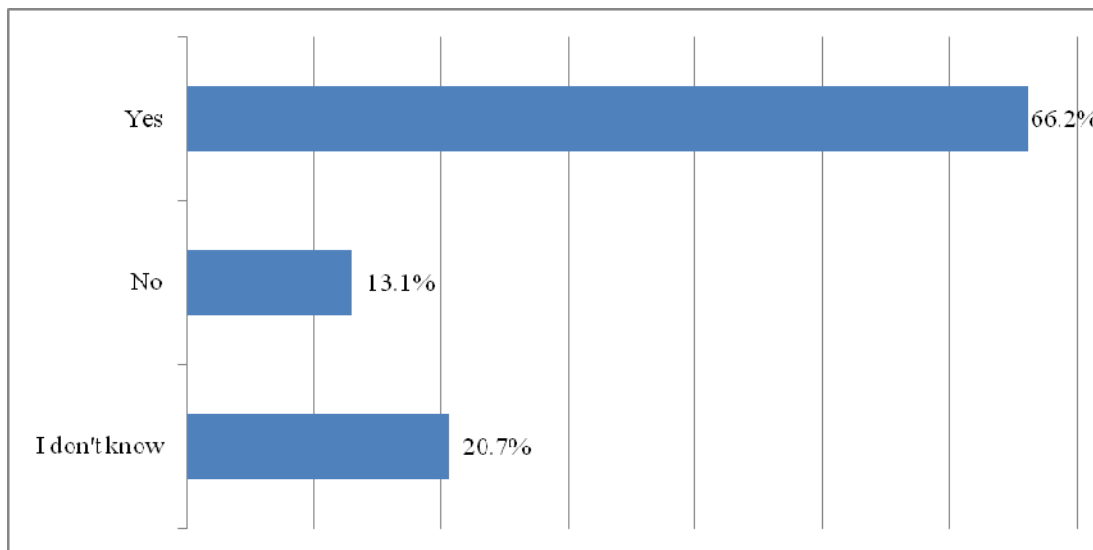
Additional write-in comments included:

- (A) Best practices sharing and education
  - ERG practices for small government agencies
  - Specific examples of domestic partner/spouse benefits best practices
  - Education on being an ally
  - Running a non-profit with volunteers
  - Help with communications
  - Recruitment of members
  - Engaged executives (all levels)
  - Influencing and moving the business forward
  - Influencing/motivating others
  - Recruitment of members
- (B) Networking with other similar ERGs
  - Networking to solve tougher issues
  - Finding ERGs that are at non-profits like ours
- (C) Global Issues
  - How to grow in countries in Asia & Middle East
- (D) On-line, job opportunities at other top LGBT employers

## AWARENESS OF OUT & EQUAL'S CURRENT ONLINE TOOLS

One key networking tool, which Out & Equal offers free of charge to organizations, is the ERG Registry. Two-thirds of respondents stated their ERG was part of the registry. However, **there is a clear opportunity to encourage the remaining third to consider taking advantage of the ERG registry tool.**

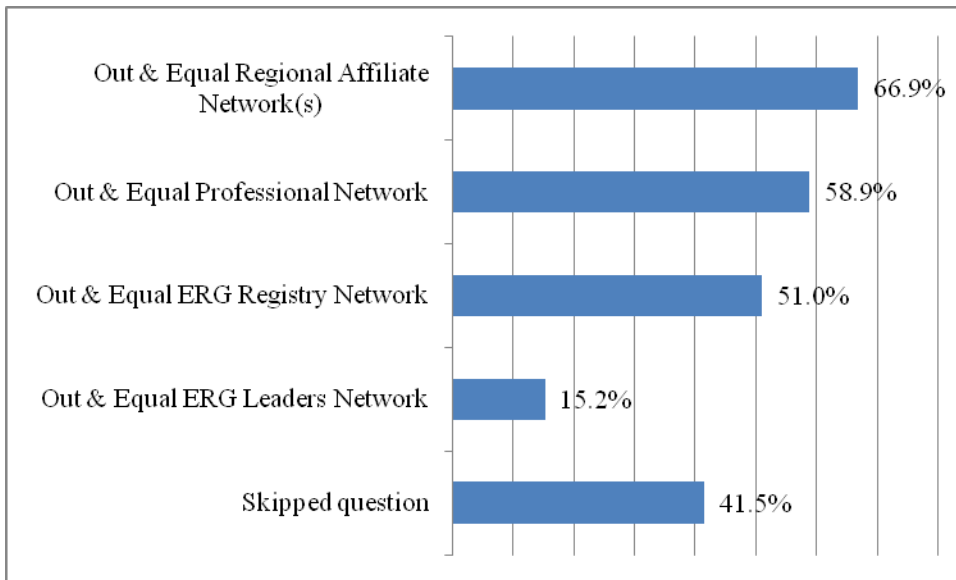
**Question:** Is your ERG/affinity group a part of Out & Equal's ERG Registry?



Other useful tools are the free Out & Equal online Professional Networks, or groupsites, powered by CollectiveX, which combine the best features of forums, calendars, email lists, and social networks. This site is a private meeting place that provides members of Out & Equal groups with a shared calendar, discussion forums, photo gallery, files, and member profiles.

While the majority of the respondents who answered the question were aware of most of the groupsites, **only 15% knew about the ERG Leaders Network**. In addition, 42% of the ERG leaders chose to skip this question, possibly due to not knowing what “Out & Equal online groups” meant. **Out & Equal has a clear opportunity to raise greater awareness of the group sites, especially the ERG Leaders Network.**

**Question:** Are you aware of any of the following Out & Equal online groups? Check all that apply.



As mentioned above, the findings of this survey bolster Out & Equal’s current assessment of ERG resource needs, and agree with Out & Equal’s current priorities for ERG support. Out & Equal is committed to grow these resources and use this information to help develop its programs in 2009 and beyond.

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**About Out & Equal**

Out & Equal™ Workplace Advocates champions safe and equitable workplaces for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. We advocate building and strengthening successful organizations that value all employees, customers and communities. We envision workplaces where all are equal regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or characteristics

**Our mission** is to educate and empower organizations, human resources professionals, employee resource groups, and individual employees through programs and services that result in equal policies, opportunities, practices and benefits in the workplace. **Out & Equal Workplace Advocates™** is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. For more information visit our website at [www.outandequal.org](http://www.outandequal.org)

## APPENDIX: DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The respondent sample of 258 ERG leaders reflected the following demographics. This sample originated from Out & Equal’s global mailing list of approximately 6,000 people.

### Sexual Orientation

Gay	66.0%
Lesbian	24.5%
Heterosexual	4.5%
Bisexual	4.0%
Queer	3.0%
Prefer not to say	0.5%

### Gender Identity

Male	64.3%
Female	31.2%
Transgender (Male to Female)	4.0%
I don't know	0.5%

### Age

Born between 1946 and 1964	41.4%
Born between 1965 and 1980	51.5%
Born after 1980	7.1%

### Role

Management	40.7%
Individual Contributor	39.2%
Support Staff	13.1%
Executive	3.0%
Other	3%
Principal/Owner	1.0%

### Industry

Financial services	25.4%
Technology	14.0%
Consumer goods	8.3%
Pharmaceuticals	5.2%
Media & publishing	4.7%
Medical/healthcare	4.7%
Government	3.1%
Utilities	2.6%
Non-profit	1.0%
Education	1.0%
Other	30.1%

### Organization headquarters

Northeast	32.8%
Midwest	22.7%
Southwest	20.7%
Northwest	7.6%
Non-US headquarters	7.1%
Southeast	5.1%
South	4.0%

### Organization's revenue

Less than \$100 million	2.0%
Between \$100 and \$500 million	5.1%
Between \$500 million and \$1 billion	7.1%
Greater than \$1 billion	77.0%
I don't know	8.7%