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Title: Employee Resource/Affinity Group Policy

Affected Agencies: Executive Branch

Authorities: King County Personnel Guidelines, Employee Conduct and Work Place Expectations, Nondiscrimination Anti-Harassment and Inappropriate Conduct policy, Ethics policy, Employee-Based EEO/AA Advisory Committee

Keywords: *Employee Resource Group, Affinity Group*

Sponsoring Agency: Office of Equity and Social Justice



King County

Executive signature: 

Date signed and effective: 7.31.19

I. Purpose

King County is committed to supporting the growth and development of workplace and work force equity by fostering the development of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), also known as Affinity Groups. An ERG is an employee-led group formed around common interests, issues, and backgrounds. County ERGs will focus exclusively on protected categories. For the purposes of this policy, the terms Employee Resource Group and Affinity Group are used interchangeably.

ERGs promote equity and social justice, foster employee engagement, strengthen workplace effectiveness, improve leadership abilities, and enhance personal and professional growth within King County. This policy establishes the requirements for the creation and administration of recognized ERGs at King County.

Protected category-specific ERGs address racism and other forms of oppression and advance the county's equity and social justice goals. ERGs are a tool for employees to build fellowship, leadership opportunities, and an inclusive environment where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed.

ERGs may be countywide or department-specific. Countywide ERGs are open to all employees and work with senior leadership and/or their representatives to inform Executive Branch policies and procedures that influence Equity and Social Justice plans for all of King County. Department-specific ERGs are only open to employees of that department. Department leadership and/or their representative may request consultation from their ERGs to inform policies and procedures, as well as the implementation of Equity and Social Justice plans.

Applicability and Audience

This policy applies to ERGs open to all employees within the Executive Branch and to ERGs open to employees within specific departments or divisions in the Executive Branch.

II. Definitions

Employee Resource Group (ERG) or Affinity Groups: An employee-led group formed around common interests, issues, and backgrounds. For the purposes of this policy, the terms Employee Resource Group and Affinity Group are used interchangeably.

ERG Representative: An employee or employee(s) whose role is to be a main point of contact for the ERG. This includes but is not limited to serving as the group contact for employees who are interested in joining, as well as serving as a liaison with members of management and/or senior leadership (for countywide groups). It is up to the ERG to decide what additional role ERG representatives may or may not have. This role is limited to a maximum of four employees per ERG.

Executive Committee: The organizing body for an ERG/Affinity Group.

Protected Category: Categories set forth in federal, state, and local anti-discrimination laws such as race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, veteran or military status, disability, age, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

III. Policy

A. Recognized Employee Resource Groups

1. In order to be a recognized ERG, ERGs shall:
 - a. Complete the application process and agree to create a formal charter, member roles, goals, and group agreements, which establishes a sustainable structure and demonstrates its relevance to advancing goals within King County Equity and Social Justice plans. The Office of Equity and Social Justice must reapprove countywide ERG charters annually. The department director or their designee must approve charters for department- and/or division-specific ERGs annually.
 - b. Secure and maintain an executive sponsor, who is either a department and/or division director for a department-specific ERG. For a countywide group, the executive sponsor must be a member of the Executive Branch cabinet and the Director of the Office of Equity and Social Justice.
 - c. Submit the application to the Office of Equity and Social Justice for approval.
 - d. Agree to coordinate with the County's efforts to promote workplace and work force equity.

B. Employee Resource Group Representative Responsibilities

1. ERG representatives shall:
 - a. ERG representatives shall act on behalf of the group. This includes but is not limited to serving as the group contact for employees who are interested in joining, as well as serving as a liaison with management and/or senior leadership (for countywide groups).
 - b. Request technical assistance from the Office of Equity and Social Justice, as needed.

C. Employee Resource Group Executive Committee

1. Each ERG shall form an executive committee. The executive committee functions as an organizing body for the ERG. The executive committee may develop documents and be responsible for ERG annual reporting. The executive committee includes ERG representatives. It is up to ERGs to develop the roles and responsibilities of the executive committee beyond what is required in this policy.
 - a. Maintain at least five active members within the ERG.
 - b. Set meetings and activities including frequency, location, purpose, and content.
 - c. Submit a report to the Office of Equity and Social Justice annually.
 - d. Collaborate with other government agencies, private businesses, nonprofits, or other agencies on events or activities that support ERG goals, if desired and approved.
 - e. It is up to the executive committee to define within the ERG what constitutes a violation of group agreements. The goal of this role is to allow ERGs to have a structured way to work out conflicts among its members. Executive committee members may request consultation from the Office of Equity and Social Justice and/or the Department of Human Resources.

D. Employee Resource Group Participation

1. Employees eligible to participate in ERGs include career service and appointed employees (including employees on their initial probation).
 - a. Term Limited Temporary employees, Short-Term Temporary employees, and intern participation is subject to manager discretion.
 - b. ERG participation shall not directly or indirectly cause overtime pay to be earned by any employee.
 - c. ERG activities that are strictly social must be scheduled during non-work time.
 - d. ERG representatives shall have six hours of work time per month to use towards ERG activities. This includes time for ERG representatives to organize, plan, and provide other support to the meeting and/or ERG activities.
 - e. Full-time employee ERG participants shall have three hours of work time per month for participating in ERG meetings and activities. Monthly allotted hours for part-time employees shall be prorated to reflect the employees' normally scheduled work week. The allotted hours include travel time for in-person meetings.

E. Manager/Supervisor Approval

1. Managers and/or supervisors shall approve employee ERG participation based on their department and/or unit needs and/or operational requirements of the department. Managers and/or supervisors shall work with interested employees to identify ways to participate in ERG activities, while meeting their employment obligations. Managers shall work with part-time employees interested in participating by calculating a prorated amount of time employees can spend on ERG activities.
 - a. Managers who approve employee ERG participation may grant permission on a one-year basis. However, each meeting or activity during work time is subject to additional approval.
 - b. When using work time to participate in ERG activities, employees shall request prior approval from their manager in order to allow managers time to ensure adequate staff coverage.
 - c. ERG participation is subject to manager approval. ERG participation will not be approved if the operational needs of the unit will not be met and/or if ERG attendance puts the employee in overtime status for that pay period.
 - d. If the employee's request is denied, the manager and/or supervisor shall provide a reason to the employee, which includes the explicit job duties and the departmental operating needs that preclude the employee's participation. The manager and/or supervisor shall also provide a timeframe for when the employee can reasonably expect to participate in the ERG.
 - e. The employee, manager and/or supervisor may request consultation from the Office of Equity and Social Justice and/or the Department of Human Resources.
 - f. Prior to participating, an employee must have an ERG participation approval form signed by the employee's manager and/or supervisor. The employee participation approval form must be re-evaluated and renewed every year. The manager and/or supervisor and the employee as part of the employee's professional development plan will keep copies of the signed participation form.

F. The Role of the Office of Equity and Social Justice

1. The Office of Equity and Social Justice shall provide support to ERGs, that include:
 - a. Provide consultation to individuals seeking to start an ERG.
 - b. Provide feedback, and approve proposals to form new ERGs.
 - c. Provide technical assistance to officially recognized ERGs.
 - d. Review annual reporting submitted by each ERG.
 - e. Identify any deficiencies that preclude recertification for the following year.
 - f. As available, provide funding to support ERG activities.
 - g. Coordinate and convene ERG representatives as needed and provide consultation on advancing the County's Equity and Social Justice goals.
 - h. Facilitate connections with similar ERGs in other organizations to support ERG success.

G. The Role of the Department of Human Resources

1. The Department of Human Resources shall:
 - a. Allocate time in the New Employee Orientation Program for ERG representatives to brief new employees on ERGs.
 - b. Provide consultation to the Office of Equity and Social Justice.
 - c. When considering discontinuing an ERG, the Office of Equity and Social Justice shall consult with the Department of Human Resources.
 - d. Provide consultation to departments and/or divisions regarding if employees on a Performance Improvement Plan can participate.
 - e. Ensuring all strategies, systems, policies, and guidelines to implement and enhance the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EEO/AA) Plans are primarily reviewed by the EEO/AA Advisory Committee.

H. Reasons to Discontinue an Employee Resource Group or an Individual Employee's Participation in an ERG

1. ERG members may be barred from participation in an ERG and/or an ERG may be discontinued for violating the following policies during participation in an ERG or ERG activity.
 - a. Violations of the Personnel Guidelines, HR Policy, or King County Code
 - b. Violations of Employee Conduct and Workplace Expectations
 - c. Violations of the Nondiscrimination, Anti-Harassment & Inappropriate Conduct Policy
 - d. Violation of the Employee Code of Ethics (KCC 3.04)
 - e. Violation of other King County policies and/or state or federal laws.
 - i. Employees may engage in approved political activity that is part of their employment duties on behalf of their department and/or division and the interests of King County.
 - f. Low membership (less than five) or inactivity for a prolonged period.
 - g. Inability to demonstrate sufficient achievement of ERG group goals.
 - h. Inability or unwillingness to comply with the requirements of the ERG Policy.
 - i. Any other reason identified by the Office of Equity and Social Justice as opposed to the interests of King County.

IV. Implementation Plan

- A. This policy becomes effective for Executive Branch departments, offices and agencies on the date that it is signed by the Executive. The Office of Equity and Social Justice is responsible for implementation of this policy.
- B. The Office of the Executive is responsible for communicating this policy to the management structure within the Executive Branch and other appropriate parties.

V. Maintenance

- A. This policy will be maintained by The Office of Equity and Social Justice, or its successor agency.
- B. This policy will automatically expire five (5) years after its effective date. A new, revised, or renewed policy will be initiated by The Office of Equity and Social Justice, or its successor agency, prior to the expiration date.

VI. Consequences for Noncompliance

- A. See section H

VII. This policy does not supercede any existing county policy.

Appendices:

- I. King County Personnel Guidelines
- II. King County Employee Conduct and Workplace Expectations
- III. King County Nondiscrimination, Anti-Harassment & Inappropriate Conduct Policy
- IV. Employee Code of Ethics (KCC3.04)
- V. King County Employee-Based EEO/AA Advisory Committee PER 22-5-2 (AEP)