

DO THE **WERQ**

*4's*

*4's* FOUNDATION

# STATE OF THE LGBTQ+ ERG

• STUDY 2024 •

**Do the WeRQ** – the premier platform dedicated to unleashing the full creative potential of the LGBTQ+ community within the U.S. advertising and marketing industry – is happy to share its first-ever **“State of the LGBTQ+ ERG” study**. Offered to ad agencies across the US, the study was fielded in partnership with the **4A's** (American Association of Advertising Agencies) and the **4A's Foundation** to assess the purpose, resources, and needs of LGBTQ+ ERGs (Employee Resource Groups). The ultimate goal is to better understand how to support these change-making groups and their LGBTQ+ members effectively.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# UNLEASHING LGBTQ+ POTENTIAL: A DEEP DIVE INTO ERGS IN ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Founded in 2020, Do the WeRQ is dedicated to fostering the full creative potential of the LGBTQ+ community within the advertising and marketing industry. And when our community arrived on the scene, we were able to build on the efforts of those who paved the way for industry progress. It's clear that **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) – for as long as they've existed – have led the way as change-making entities for DEI progress.** These teams impact not only employee engagement, talent acquisition and retention but also foster LGBTQ+ inclusivity, driving policy advancements, and championing talent.

Within our industry, LGBTQ+ ERGs are, and will be, essential in providing cultural insights that lead to more effective marketing campaigns, nurturing talent from underrepresented groups, and advocating for greater representation and inclusivity in advertising and media.

Related data proves how important these groups are to emerging talent. The recent [2024 Survey on Advertising Industry Professionals](#) – conducted by The Myers Report – highlighted critical insights into the availability, participation, and interest in ad industry ERGs and shed light on the role they play in supporting diverse employee populations. Across all types of ERG, employees aged 18-34 show the highest interest in ERGs (61%) compared to those aged 55+; this suggests that younger employees view ERGs as valuable resources for building connections and support networks early in their careers. Employees with less than two years in the industry demonstrate the strongest interest (64%) and consistent participation (26%) in ERGs; the data indicates that newer employees may be more eager to engage with ERGs to establish their place within the company.

Specific to LGBTQ+ communities, amidst a growing emphasis on accountability in multicultural marketing, brands and agencies often highlight ERGs as proof of their commitment to diversity and inclusion. Yet, **a clear understanding of the scale, resources, and functions of these groups has been elusive – until now.**

Our study aimed to explore the perspective and needs of LGBTQ+ ERG organizers, providing an in-depth exploration into the roles that ERGs play in our industry and how to best support and measure their impact. **We encourage all leaders across the industry to review the findings, and engage their ERGs immediately** to discuss how these industry-wide perspectives reflect on the reality of their own ERG teams – to engage in dialogue on how they can better support these teams for a world that needs diverse perspectives more than ever.



## KEY FINDINGS:

- **Desire for more support:** While most ERGs (93%) reported at least moderate stakeholder support, this backing was often limited in scope and timing, with 53% desiring more active leadership involvement beyond key periods like Pride Month.
- **Aspire for greater impact and influence:** Less than a third had a formal mission statement aligned with business goals, and only 15% were measured on their impact. Many (53%) expressed a desire for a greater role in shaping agency policy.
  - **Positive impact on cultural belonging:** A significant majority (60%) reported a moderate to strong impact on cultural belonging within their agency. All ERGs surveyed reported at least a moderate impact to their agency overall, if they ceased to operate.
  - **Need for enhanced networking opportunities:** While 73% have initiatives to boost networking among LGBTQ+ ERG members, this was the #1 need, with nearly half identifying this as an area needing further support.
  - **Room for progress:** Although most ERGs maintain a somewhat positive outlook on progress, none expressed outright optimism – highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by the community.

From these findings, we recommend the following actions to empower ERGs and amplify their impact:

- **Track and Measure Impact:** Provide resources to help ERGs establish clear measurement criteria and track their business and cultural impact on their agencies.
- **Facilitate Networking Opportunities:** Facilitate networking opportunities, particularly local, in-person events that enable cross-ERG networking and foster a larger community.
- **Collaborate for Impact and Inspiration:** Collect and share examples of ERG influence on creative work and agency policy to set benchmarks and inspire other ERGs seeking to expand their reach.

By implementing these recommendations, we can further unleash the potential of LGBTQ+ ERGs, driving meaningful change within the advertising and marketing industry and fostering a more inclusive and equitable workplace for all. **Do the WeRQ is actively reformulating its 2025 strategic plans and programs to address the most urgent needs to these groups, and will connect with the 4A's around solutions** we might provide together for the greater good of the industry.

We thank you for your curiosity about how the community insights can lead the way to better collaborations and growth.

### Do the WeRQ

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## METHODOLOGY

This study is the first-ever look at the characteristics of LGBTQ+ ERGs – perhaps in any industry – and was designed to better understand their impact. Fifteen representatives of different ad agency LGBTQ+ ERGs (the head or co-lead) participated in the study. Participants included a wide cross-section of agencies varying in size and focus, representing different regions and providing significant insights. We only reached out to and surveyed leadership of LGBTQ+ ERGs vs members of those groups, to speak on behalf of the full team; our laser focus on those change-makers speaks to what need to motivate the larger base of participants.

## LGBTQ+ ERGS HAVE A DESIRE FOR BROADER SUPPORT FROM AGENCY LEADERSHIP

When we asked ERG leaders about the level of support they receive from their agencies, most reported at least moderate support.

However, direct leadership involvement in ERGs is not as widespread, and some feel support wanes outside of moments like Pride Month.

### Does your ERG have a direct connection to your company leadership?

No, we don't have executive sponsors/leadership stakeholders

13%

Yes, we have executive sponsors/leadership stakeholders, but they're not active ERG participants

33%

Yes, we have executive sponsors/leadership stakeholders who are active ERG participants

53%

### KEY FINDING

- 93% of ERGs report at least moderate support from their agencies
- Only 53% have active participation from leadership throughout the year
- 53% of ERGs want more active participation from leadership outside of Pride months

### RECOMMENDATION

Educating leadership on the importance of ERGs and implementing processes for regular check-ins can help boost involvement



Don't just support us during Pride month, but when a bill that takes away our rights comes up, don't be afraid to get political and stand with us. **The amount of money and support people put into the community waxes and wanes so easily.**



I am really grateful to work at the agency I do. **Leadership genuinely cares and wants to do all they can to make this place inclusive and equitable.**

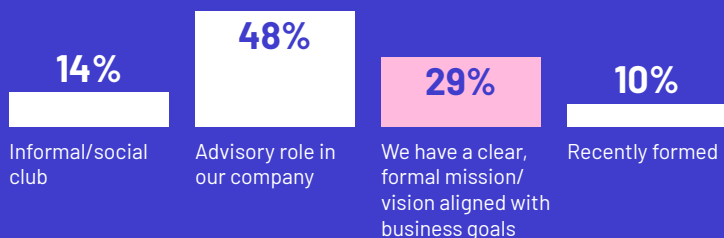
# LGBTQ+ ERGS ASPIRE FOR GREATER CREATIVE IMPACT AND AGENCY INFLUENCE

When exploring the extent ERGs are able to influence creative work and agency policy, we found less than a third have formal alignment with broader business goals, and are instead only advisory.

This, along with roughly half of ERG leaders looking for a larger role in shaping agency policy and connecting to client work, reveals a general underutilization of ERGs knowledge and expertise.

“[We want more] recognition, engagement, and empowerment to **have a more visible, understood role in the work we produce** and the way we work together.”

## How formal is your ERG organization?



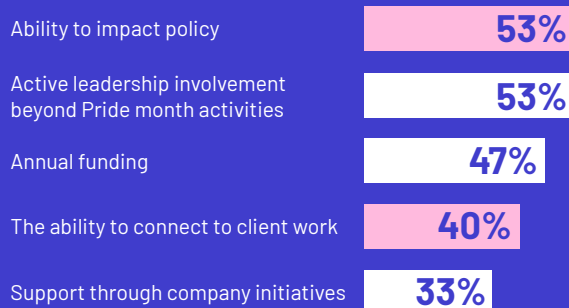
## KEY FINDING

- Only 29% have a formal mission aligned with business goals
- 53% express a desire for greater policy impact
- 40% want more input on client work

## RECOMMENDATION

Treating ERGs as “business resource groups” rather than culture clubs with processes for consultation on company policy and creative can help expand the role and impact of ERGs

## Which of the following would be most helpful for you to have in the future to ensure your ERGs success?

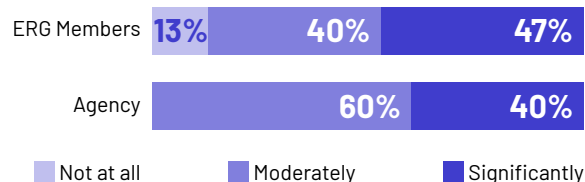


# LGBTQ+ ERGS HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR MEMBERS' SENSE OF BELONGING

One of the strongest sentiments among ERG leaders is the vital role in cultivating a sense of belonging within the agency.

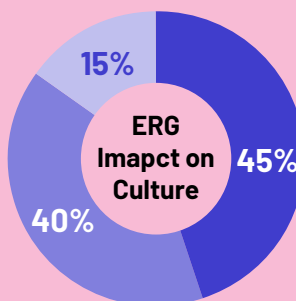
The majority of ERGs also say they have an impact on company culture, and that without their organizations both the agency and their members would be negatively affected, highlighting their importance in nurturing workplace culture.

## If your ERG went away tomorrow, how much would your members be impacted?



**Level of Impact**

- Slight
- Moderate
- Strong



“[It would cause] a lack of a community working towards ensuring conscious inclusion for the queer community, with a **direct loss on the strategic and creative rigour we bring.**”

## KEY FINDING

- 60% of ERGs say they have at least a moderate impact on company culture
- Leaders believe 87% of ERG members would be negatively impacted if their ERG went away, along with 100% of agencies

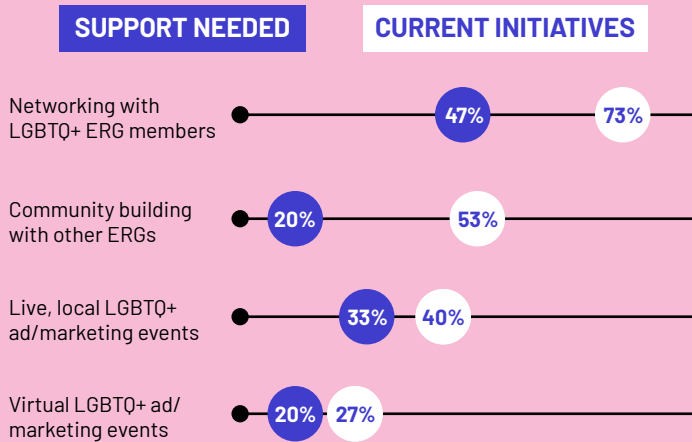
## RECOMMENDATION

Ensuring ERGs are highly visible within their agencies and industry at large can help members feel acknowledged and allow them to be comfortable to be “out”

# LGBTQ+ ERGS DEMAND ADDITIONAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

When we asked ERG leaders about their ability to network among their members, the majority already have initiatives to improve networking.

Despite this, networking remains the top area needing support, with nearly half of ERGs identifying it as a key area for development, underscoring the importance of these initiatives.



## KEY FINDING

- 73% of ERGs say their agencies already have initiatives to boost networking
- 47% say they need support for networking with other LGBTQ+ ERG members

## RECOMMENDATION

Facilitate networking opportunities, particularly local, in-person events that enable cross-ERG networking and foster a larger community can help expand ERG networks and cultivate a sense of broader community.

# DESPITE ADVANCEMENTS, THERE IS STILL ROOM FOR PROGRESS

Asking LGBTQ+ ERG leaders about their attitude towards the progress made in the LGBTQ+ community across the ad/marketing industry revealed some skepticism among the positive sentiment.

While ERGs generally maintain a positive outlook, none expressed outright optimism. This reflects the ongoing challenges faced by the ERG community, indicating that while there is some advancement, significant obstacles remain.

## KEY FINDING

- 71% are **somewhat positive** about the progress for the LGBTQ+ community across the ad/marketing industry
- But, 0% are **very positive** about the progress

## RECOMMENDATION

Collect and share examples of ERG influence on creative work and agency policy to set benchmarks and inspire other ERGs seeking to expand their impact and reach their full potential

“It feels like the country as a whole is either outright turning on the Queer community, or shying away from support for fear of upsetting the first group. And this feels evident in advertising as well.”

“There continues to be 2 steps forward, 1 step back feeling. The ERG and community makes progress but then **funding or brands have become afraid of actively supporting or marketing to the community.**”



# DO THE WERQ

## About Do the WeRQ

Founded in 2020, **Do the WeRQ** is a community and platform with a clear and important mission: to increase LGBTQ+ creativity, representation, and share of voice in the marketing and advertising industry. Our members and volunteers work to deliver inspiration, mobilization, and celebration that drive sustainable, visible change. In pursuit of this mission, Do the WeRQ creates and leads a range of initiatives including research and data solutions, insightful programming and networking opportunities – including some of the industry's most talented and proudly out thought leaders. Follow @DotheWeRQ on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

# A's | A's FOUNDATION

## About the 4A's

The 4A's was established in 1917 to promote, advance, and defend the interests of member agencies, employees and the advertising and marketing industry overall. We empower and equip our members to confidently navigate the ever-changing ecosystem of the agency world. We ensure they remain relevant, are positioned to compete, and have the resources to thrive and grow. With a focus on advocacy, talent and driving business growth and cultural change, the organization serves 600+ member agencies across 1,200 offices, which help direct more than 85% of total U.S. advertising spend. The 4A's includes the 4A's Benefits division, which insures more than 160,000 employees; the government relations team, who advocate for policies to support the industry; and the 4A's Foundation, which advocates for and connects diverse talent to the marketing industry by fostering a culture of curiosity, creativity and craft to fuel a more equitable future.

**Follow the 4A's** | To learn more, visit: <https://www.aaaa.org/>

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